Reviewer's report

Title: Do COPD patients take timely measures in periods of symptom deterioration?

Version: 1 Date: 3 May 2011

Reviewer: Jennifer K Quint

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This is an interesting and well written article addressing the important issue of patient self management in the event of symptom deterioration in patients with COPD. The limitations are discussed well in the discussion; however the methodology is quite confusing.

Major compulsory revisions

1. The definition of exacerbation quoted is incorrectly referenced. The authors state that patients required 3 major symptoms or a major and minor and reference the London cohort but this was NOT the definition used by the London COPD group. This is also confusing with respect to grading of exacerbations as according to the authors definition a type 4 exacerbation will not have been counted as an exacerbation.

2. The authors mention the collection of symptom scores in the methodology but they are not discussed in the results. There is no mention of symptom score with relation to type of actions for example.

3. There is no a priori hypothesis stated or power calculation.

4. Please provide confidence intervals instead of standard deviations.

5. It is possible that some of the statistical findings in the results may have occured by chance, e.g. current smoking and energy conservation. The results should be discussed with respect to underlying hypothesis and not just in terms of a significant p value.

Minor essential revisions

5. The title is very vague. It is not clear what constitutes a timely measure or what a period of symptom deterioration is. If it is an exacerbation, than this should be stated.

6. The first sentence of the abstract is incorrect. It is stated that “exacerbations seem clinically important”. It is well known that exacerbations are clinically important events.

7. Please define energy conservation.

8. The patients are recruited from very different environments; post discharge from hospital and outpatient settings leading to a very diverse group. Patients recently discharged from hospital may be more educated about exacerbations as they have recently had one and may be more likely to notice symptom changes
and do something about it.

Discretionary revisions
9. The use of a convenience sample of patients is not ideal and may introduce bias.
10. 6 weeks is not a long period of time but the authors do discuss this in the paper.
11. This is not strictly speaking a cohort study.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.