Reviewer’s report

Title: Depression and Anxiety as major determinants of neck pain: a cross-sectional study in general practice

Version: 2 Date: 4 December 2008

Reviewer: Scott Patten

Reviewer’s report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions
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None

> - Minor Essential Revisions
>
> The author can be trusted to make these. For example, missing labels on figures, the wrong use of a term, spelling mistakes.
>
1. On page 8, it should be "in total" rather than "on total"

2. In the second last sentence of the results section, "analyses" is plural, so the accompanying article should also be plural "These analyses..." rather than "This analyses..

> - Discretionary Revisions
>
> These are recommendations for improvement which the author can choose to ignore. For example clarifications, data that would be useful but not essential.
>
1. I feel that the manuscript now achieves the right balance with respect to causal interpretations.

The conclusions section of the abstract now draws a distinction between the assessment of burden (a descriptive epidemiologic aim that does not invoke causal assumptions) and hypothesis generation - also a legitimate goal for cross-sectional studies in analytical epidemiologic research.

In view of this distinction, I tend to think that the abstract could be strengthened by reporting the associations with education level, social support deficits and exercise. Since these effects disappear with adjustment for depression and anxiety scores they may either be confounded by the psychosocial characteristics, or may share a causal chain with the psychosocial characteristics. Nevertheless, in a descriptive sense, they do help to add to what
the study accomplishes at a descriptive level. I think it would be sufficient to include a sentence indicating that associations with these variables were seen, but that they did not persist with adjustment for the depression and anxiety.

2. In the text, the changes between crude and adjusted analyses are summarized in a paragraph on page 10. Readers would be interested in the authors' interpretations of the findings - is it because these variables are on a chain of causal events? Or, is it because they are confounded by depression and anxiety?

**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 have no competing interests to declare.