Reviewer's report

Title: Staying at work with back pain: patients' experiences of work-related help received from GPs and other clinicians. A qualitative study.

Version: 1 Date: 24 May 2010

Reviewer: Sarah Dean

Reviewer's report:

Staying at work with back pain: patients’ experiences of work-related help received from GPs and other clinicians. A qualitative study.

Thank you for asking me to re-review this paper. My review is based on the assessing guidelines provided by the journal.

1) Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
Yes this has been clearly expressed.

2) Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
Only a little detail has been given about the methodology used in this study as the authors refer to a previously published paper that contains more detailed information. I was easily able to find this on-line referenced source, however it did not contain much more information about the methodology; it did however contain more details about the method and procedures undertaken plus a fuller description of the participants.

3) Are the data sound and well controlled?
For a qualitative study that has undertaken a straightforward thematic analysis the data have been obtained and managed in an appropriate manner. I do not consider it necessary to have emergent themes confirmed by participants, especially when themes arise from a number of different participants.

4) Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes, although for qualitative studies that use thematic analysis on medium to large samples (with 25 participants being a medium size) it is helpful to know what proportion of participants contributed to each theme (this information can be given in the text or as a table, it helps the reader consider whether a theme represents the experiences of the whole, or most, of the sample or whether there are some participants who have very different views / experiences).

5) Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes this works well.
6) Do the title and abstract clearly convey what has been found?
   Yes.

7) Is the writing acceptable?
   Yes

Summary
This is a straightforward account of some further findings from a previously published qualitative study. The paper highlights issues related to clinicians (not) managing work issues for patients with low back pain and so sets a number of challenges for addressing this problem; I wish the authors well with their future research endeavours.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Please include gender as one of the variables reported when describing the participants.

Please clarify what is meant by ‘large’ employers when describing the work place of participants. Although these two points are covered in the earlier paper it would help to have at least these details repeated here to allow this paper to stand alone in terms of describing its participants.

Please include (PT) in first quote on page 8 to identify who ‘he’ is (first line of quote). In same way that the second quote has (GP) inserted to clarify who is saying what.

Please clarify (if need be by inserting a comment in brackets) what ‘paper’ means in first quote, top of page 10. I presume it means ‘certificate’?

Please expand upon the comment made in first line of the ‘strengths and limitations’ section. In what way were early interviews constrained?

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Insert ‘at work’ at end of sentence, line 5, page 13.
Insert apostrophe for ‘patients’ feel’ on line 6, page 13.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Consider inserting a table to show number or proportion of participants who contributed to each theme.
Consider including standard deviation of participant age, or perhaps range of
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.