Reviewer's report

Title: The effect of nursing instruction in patients receiving steroid pulse therapy for the treatment of autoimmune diseases

Version: 3 Date: 12 April 2010

Reviewer: Sarah Hewlett

Reviewer's report:

This revision is clearer than the original submission, but is still difficult to follow.

Major compulsory revisions

1 The abstract and the background both state that the aim of this research was only to assess the need for nursing instruction. That implies an observational study. However, the title, results, discussion and conclusion are all largely about the effect of a nursing INTERVENTION on patient knowledge. Surely this intervention was the main aim of the study? The aims need to be clarified.

2 The abstract conclusion is that this study shows that a nursing intervention can improve patient knowledge. However, the abstract results section that precedes this statement, contains no results on patient knowledge. These must be added.

3 Methods - the authors explain how need for instruction is measured, and how knowledge is measured. However, results are also presented for 'level of symptom distress' which is apparently a 3rd questionnaire. No information on how these data were collected and scored is given in the methods section. This needs to be added.

4 Methods - for the need for instruction questionnaire, we need to know how it was scored. In Table 3 scores are presented for each of the 9 categories but no explanation has been given. Are the scores from 0-5? 0-10? Does a high score indicate a high need? This needs to be explained.

5 Discussion limitations: The authors should reflect that their main outcome questionnaires on patient nursing needs and knowledge were designed by them, and the test-retest reliability and sensitivity to change are not known.

6 Table 2 reports that patients had increased knowledge after the nursing intervention. Which time point is reported here - immediately after, or at 1 week? or 2 weeks? All three sets of data must be reported, not just one favourable set, so that the reader knows there is no bias in reporting and can judge the results for themselves.

7 Discussion: The authors state on page 11 that they found 'the overall distress of patients with regards to symptoms decreased after receiving nursing instructions'. However, these data have not been provided in the results section. The data they have presented are about knowledge increase (Table 2),
predictors of symptom distress (Table 3), reduced need for instruction (Table 4), and predictors of need for instruction (Table 5), but no results on change in symptom distress. These data need to be provided in the results section, they cannot just be mentioned in the discussion without evidence.

8 If there is reduction in symptom distress, it is not possible to attribute this to the nursing intervention, as symptoms might have been reduced by the steroids and this would need to be addressed in the limitations section.

Minor Essential revisions
9 Methods - patients received 500mg of what drug?

10 Table 3 - some significant p values have not been marked with an asterisk, and one non-significant p value has

Discretionary revisions
11 The authors state in the background and in the discussion that most patients go home on the same day of their steroid infusion. However, in this study, 70% of patients stayed in hospital for at least 5 days. Some comment on the representativeness of this sample would therefore be helpful.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'