Reviewer's report

Title: The German Fibromyalgia Consumer Reports - A cross-sectional survey

Version: 1 Date: 7 February 2012

Reviewer: Anna Ferguson

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Amendments

Are the methods appropriate and well described?

Yes the authors do appear to be using an appropriate methodology and this is adequately detailed. I did wonder whether the headings used could be more like those seen in usual journals:

e.g. Methods
Recruitment (instead of ‘study centres’)
Procedure (‘Organisation of the study’)
Inclusion and exclusion criteria (seemed appropriate)

I think specifically in the relation to the questionnaire section the authors should organise this with “Questionnaires” being the main title and then have the title of each questionnaire as a subheading (in italics) with the authors names as well. This may be dependent on how the journal requires the authors to layout their information.

e.g. Questionnaires
Benefits and Harms of FMS-Therapies (author)
With detail of what questionnaire entails under each subheading

Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4 author)

Is the writing acceptable?

In the main the writing is good however there are a number of typos and the use of some words which don’t appear to be correct. For examples the word ‘valuated’ is used several times – I think the authors mean ‘evaluated’. This may be because the paper has been translated from German into English but these typing errors should be addressed prior to publication.

Major Essential Amendments:

Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The abstract is very clear but I think it would be helpful for the authors to state
more clearly the research questions/objectives in the introduction as these appear to be much clearer in the abstract. All the authors currently say is that they will do a consumer report which looks at both effectiveness and side effects of FMS therapies – can the research questions be made more explicit or at least expanded upon.

Are the data sound?

Hard to tell this as not a statistician but they appear to be. However, from looking more closely at the tables in the back there is clearly missing data – as some of the totals do not add up to the numbers recruited. The authors must highlight how much missing data there is and how it was treated in the analysis. Missing data is often extremely problematic in such postal surveys.

The layout of the numbers in the tables also need to be consistent as on occasions the authors report means/percentages with a decimal point i.e. 4.8 and then in table 2, 3, 4 the means/percentages appear to have commas in them i.e. 56,0. This needs to be corrected.

Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The statistics reported are purely descriptive and so there does not appear to be any sophisticated statistical analysis required. One thing that is clearly not reported in the tables at the back is ethnicity information. The authors should be included if possible.

It would also be important to compare the patient responses from the self-help group to the data from the clinic settings- to see whether the two recruitment populations are different. This should at least be explored prior to publication perhaps using t-tests. As this might indicate that the samples are significantly different from one another and therefore may limit generalisability.

Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The authors only explore the outcomes very briefly and I think the paper would be greatly strengthened by more exploration of the results in the discussion. The authors refer to a previous study in their introduction by Bennett, Jones, Turk, Russell and Matallana (2007) this paper discusses the results in greater detail. I think the authors should refer to this paper to guide them in writing up their findings. I think this would be essential prior to publication.

Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

The authors do report on the limitations although these appear to be mainly in relation to doing consumer reports generally. I feel the limitations could be more focussed on the current work or at least how the limitations they suggest are demonstrated in the current paper.
The report does not focus on the missing data and the limitations of this. The authors should discuss this.

General Comments

Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

Yes although there appears to be very little literature carrying out a similar consumer reports prior to this one.

Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Yes the abstract appears to be very clear and concise.

**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