Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Factors associated with the severity and improvement of fatigue in patients with advanced cancer presenting to an outpatient palliative care clinic

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 9 May 2012

**Reviewer:** Karin van der Rijt

**Reviewer’s report:**

In this manuscript the authors describe a study in a large cohort of patients visiting an outpatient palliative care clinic. The authors study correlates of cancer related fatigue and predictors for improvement. Especially because of the number of patients included in the study, n=1788, the manuscript is of value and ultimately merits international publication. I would like to make some comments to further strengthen the manuscript:

**Major revisions:**

- the authors do not give information on the oncological treatments used in the weeks before and after referral to the outpatient palliative care clinic, whereas cancer related fatigue is one of the most frequent complications of various anti-tumor therapies. What about the time of referral to the palliative care service? Is a group of patients referred after stopping anti-tumor therapy, thereby causing a decrease of chemotherapy induced fatigue, for example?

- the authors mention the retrospective design and the use of a single-item instrument as limitations of the study. I agree with that. However, the fact that the ESAS was not always completed by the patients themselves, should also be considered as a limitation. When a nurse a caregiver helps the patient filling out the questionnaire, scores may differ from scores given by the patient himself. Is bias possible by selective help for the most fatigued patients?

**Minor revisions:**

- I wonder why the authors did not study if changes in fatigue scores were related to changes in the severity of other ESAS scores; this would more strongly imply a causal relation between symptom load and fatigue

- in the conclusion the authors state that their findings show that fatigue is the most commonly reported symptom; however, no percentages are given. The authors show that fatigue was the most severe symptom.

- I do not understand the explanation given for the relation between GU cancer and a decrease in fatigue. The authors mention androgen deprivation. However, androgen deprivation will not improve during the last phase of the disease.

**Discretionary revision:**

The OR’s for the symptoms are quite low. Could the authors comment on the low scores?
**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'