Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence of distressing symptoms in hospitalised patients on medical wards. A cross-sectional study.

Version: 1 Date: 20 June 2008

Reviewer: Robin Fainsinger

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?  
   Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?  
   Yes
3. Are the data sound?  
   Yes
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?  
   Yes
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?  
   Yes
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?  
   Yes
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?  
   Yes
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?  
   Yes
9. Is the writing acceptable?  
   yes

Discretionary Revisions

1. The rating of pain severity described in the methods is somewhat unusual. The most common cut points in the literature are mild pain 0-3/4; moderate 4/5-6/7; severe 7/8-10. The authors have referenced their choice, but an expanded rationale would be helpful.

2. Have made some suggestions for changes in the wording of the first paragraph in the results.
Ten patients were not asked to participate due to circumstances on their ward and lack of time for the staff.

Sixty-two patients were excluded from the study due to the following reasons: 32 patients were not able to participate, 19 patients were not willing to participate, six patients had undergone surgery in the last 24 hours, four patients were not able to complete the questionnaire or the interview (drop outs), and one patient was in a state in which it was deemed unethical to ask for participation.

3. Suggest change the last sentence of the "Strengths & weaknesses" to :- We therefore think that the number of palliative patients reported here is underestimated.

4. In the discussion section "Comparison with other studies", the authors refer to 3 as the cut point for significant. As 0-4 is considered mild pain in many (? most) reports this is perhaps not as restrictive as the authors suggest. This may warrant more comment & explanation.

5. In figure 1 would again suggest using the word "circumstances" rather than "chaos".

**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