Reviewer's report

Title: The NEECHAM Confusion scale and the Delirium Observation Screening scale: predictive value and ease of use in clinical practice

Version: 1 Date: 23 October 2006
Reviewer: Leana Uys

Reviewer's report:

General Report

This is a small study, but it is clearly useful in that it assists practice nurses to make decisions with regard to two available instruments that can be used in practice. It is carefully enough done to make the results useful.

1. The questions are well defined, but the authors need to clarify the terms they use and use them consistently. When they talk about the aim of the study on page 3, they refer to “testing sensitivity”. When they describe the design and sample on page 4, they talk about testing “predictive value”. When they get to the discussion, they refer almost exclusively to positive and negative prediction. None of these terms are defined anywhere. Was the predictive value predictive of a positive DSMIV diagnosis of dementia? Then this should be stated. Similarly positive and negative prediction should be defined.

2. The methods are adequate, but certain information is not clear. Under “procedure” the authors describe the sampling with the sentence starting “During five months…” I do not understand the procedure. Did a clinical nurse specialist identify patients every day, and on days when there were more than 4 selected the first four alphabetically? If that is how it worked, this should be clarified. But then, what does the reference to “every two weeks” mean?

Another question I had in terms of the methodology was whether nurses completed the instruments individually or as a team. Or was primary nursing used in the hospital which meant that only one nurse was involved in with a patient during a specific shift?

It is not made clear during the methods section what questions were asked of the nurses in terms of evaluating the instruments. Perhaps even at this early portion of the article the reader can be referred to the relevant table, since that is where the questions become clear. However, there is a discussion about the time each instrument took to complete, and this item is not reflected in the table (four).

3. The data seems to be sound, but something seems to have been left out, and that is specific information about false positives and false negatives in the results section. It seems that some such results were found, and are referred to in the discussion section, but there are no such results reported.

I also missed a full reference explaining what “MMSE” means (P5,6,etc). What does this refer to? Did I miss it?

4. The discussion and conclusions are well done – balanced and comprehensive. The reference here to false positives and the “15 out of 16” seems to belong to the results section, not to discussion in the first instance.

5. The title and abstract are accurate and informative.

6. The writing is acceptable. A few instances of poor English was found (e.g. p3 “two scales are developed” should be “two scaled have been developed”), but on the whole the articles reads well.

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

The aspects of the article which I pointed out as unclear should be clarified (definition of terms, procedure, false positive and negative results, MMSE)

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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)
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

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

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.