Reviewer’s report

Title: Practice Nurses' views of their role in the management of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalitis: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 7 October 2008

Reviewer: Eva Libman

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer’s report: Major Compulsory Revisions

It should be noted that I am only minimally familiar with qualitative research methods.

1. The authors need to make it clear that the sample is not representative of the general population of practice nurses. Participants were recruited from a sample that had already had some exposure to chronic fatigue in another study, and only 40% of these agreed to be interviewed.

2. The only table included is awkwardly presented. I do not understand columns 3 and 5 (Number of Practice Nurses…., Practice list size (000)). The descriptive features of the sample could be presented as means and standard deviations or ranges.

3. In the development of the theme categories, I would have liked some data on inter-rater reliability.

4. Results are presented to illustrate the flavour of the themes, but leave many unanswered questions, e.g. how many responses fell into each of the thematic categories? Did the responses of individual nurses fall into more than one category? Such information could be presented in frequency tables.

5. The above points make interpretation difficult. The authors do not help matters by using terms like “a minority” or “a majority” of the sample, without specifying any numbers. In the Discussion section, the authors state “Many nurses were keen to expand their current knowledge and gain more experience....” This appears to be unfounded in view of the 60% of nurses who refused to be interviewed, and the number of negative comments about CFS made by some in the remaining small sample.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. A more realistic (and perhaps pessimistic) interpretation should be taken of this descriptive data. The findings as presented suggest that most practice nurses as well as primary care physicians have neither the time nor the inclination to deal effectively with patients who have CFS (and, in fact, need more time and attention than busy practitioners have available).

2. If treating patients with CFS is, in fact, not feasible in the family practice setting, suggestions for the role of Practice Nurses might include: (a) team approach, headed by a psychologist knowledgeable about CFS, daytime fatigue
and sleep disorder; (b) patients should be seen by health practitioners specializing in CFS, rather than individual practitioners who have small numbers of such patients, and could profitably be treated with CBT in groups, which give them the opportunity to learn coping techniques from each other as well as from health professionals.

3. CFS could be demystified for the nurses by pointing out that they already deal with debilitating fatigue in other illnesses such as MS, lupus, and cancers).

**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 have no competing interests