Reviewer's report

Title: The hidden cost of chronic fatigue to patients and their families

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Reviewer: Petros Skapinakis

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-written paper on the cost of chronic fatigue using a primary care sample of patients. The paper has a sound methodology which is potentially interesting for other researchers who would like to study other similar illnesses, the instruments used are valid and reliable, the analysis and the presentation are ok. Certainly, the findings are not "exciting" but I think that the message is a helpful one, namely that the costs of informal care are high. I suggest some ideas for the revision that may help improve the paper.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Two variables were mainly found to be associated with higher costs: fatigue severity and functional limitation measured with WASA. I think that the inclusion of WASA scores on the regression model may pose some problems in interpretation and could be an overadjustment. For example, it is not known whether a higher functional limitation is the result of higher psychiatric symptomatology, or longer duration of fatigue or a physical attribution of fatigue. Since we do not have any clues on possible cause and effect relationships, the inclusion of WASA in the regression model may mask some important associations. What I suggest as a solution is to carry out an analysis before and after inclusion of WASA scores. Any differences that may arise will be a matter of interpretation. I think that the paper will benefit from such an additional analysis, but I leave to the authors the decision whether they would like to present this analysis in Table 4 or just mention this in the text.

Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract: line 5, add "aim" after "The main"

page 4, introduction: I would suggest that you change the term "predictors" of fatigue with a more neutral term, for example to identify sociodemographic and clinical variables associated with higher costs. The term predictor implies that this variable predicts higher costs but this association could also be explained by confounding or recall bias etc

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