Reviewer’s report

Title: What causes treatment failure - the patient, primary care, secondary care or inadequate interaction in the health services?

Version: 1 Date: 12 August 2010

Reviewer: nadia abdulhadi

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions the authors must respond to these before a decision on publication can be reached.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes the research question is well defined in the introduction part together with the aims of the study.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
In-spite of the importance of the study and issues related to treatment failure of gastroesophageal reflux as a chronic condition that can interrupt the quality of life, the methods were not explained appropriately for the following reasons:

1. The authors mentioned that they used both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection through semi-structured interviews with 12 patients and then questionnaires for the doctors to evaluate the responses of the 12 patients: there is no any explanation to the guide topics of the interviews; what were the questions asked to the patients; closed or opened questions or both; what were the responses of the patients; how the patients expressed their concerns, opinions and dissatisfaction with interactions with their doctors? There is no any qualitative analysis and this qualitative part is completely missed in this article and the authors directly went for scoring and focused on the questionnaire. There should be no figures or numbers when present qualitative data, there is a neglect for what persons with considerable GERD symptoms expressed and felt. It could be better if there was an appropriate qualitative approach especially that the authors talked about it in the discussion section.

2. There were no details about the questionnaire: how and why it was designed and divided into four groups; how the questions were developed or obtained?
Any link with the previous follow up study that authors mentioned? Are these four groups and related causes or factors had been assumed or discussed by the authors to be factors for treatment failure when they designed the questionnaire? Please explain. Also it was not shown in a separate Annex as also for the interview guide, both are better to be shown fully in annexes with explanation in the method section as this will help the readers to follow and understand

3. With regard to the selection of the 18 doctors: it could be better to tell more about how these doctors been selected; role of these doctors in management of GERD; did they had interactions with the selected patients; and where they are working? In primary care, secondary care or hospitals?

4. The figure that showing patients’ selection out of the 179 patients participated in the previous study is confusing, which questionnaire was received by the patients? What is the experience of the selected patients with primary or secondary care? Why not to talk more in the text about patients’ selection instead of just mentioning that (patients with moderate or severe symptoms as judged from a questionnaire were asked to participate)? It was not enough just to refer to the previous study in this regard

5. It will be good if patients’ educational level and occupation added to their demographic characteristics in table 1 in addition to their current treatment/medication

6. It is important to describe the setting since the study has a qualitative part in terms of structure of care in Norway; referral system and so--- or at least to refer to it in a few words or to refer to the previous study (reference 5) as this will also help in understanding the link between the 2 studies

3. Are the data sound?

- The interpretation of the results was not sound; very short and did not reflect how the treatment failure causes were reached? Please refer to the above comments on the methods. Again no presentation to the qualitative part and the focus, although also brief, was only on the agreement and interpretation of the doctors to what the patients said in the interviews which were not shown as should be done for qualitative analysis. For instance, the matter of patient-doctor interaction is a crucial and highly important part of clinical practice and health outcomes, it should not be measured by figures and that is it, factors should be clearly stated as patients expressed and not as per doctors’ interpretation. The results presentation in general was insufficient and did not adequately answer the research questions. I suggest elaborating the patients’ perceptions through appropriate transcription and content analysis of the interviews as to show what themes/categories emerged from the data and what are the patients’ real concerns and barriers for successful treatment; communication and interaction problems are they from patients or doctors’ side or both? In addition to other organizational factors that been mentioned as causes for treatment failure, primary and secondary care. How all these factors been concluded? Did the interviewed patients mention that?

- It will be better to clarify more in the text about doctors’ interpretations to the interviews. It is somehow not convenient to follow that in the provided figures.
The first paragraph in the Result section is better to be moved to the methods section.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

In table 1 – calculations should be in Medians and not means as the samples are small

- Why ANOVA had been used for presentation of results? Why not Non/parametric test as the sample size is small?
- It is not clear how the P value had been calculated in figures 3 and 4?
- The labels of the figures are not kept with the figures- kept in a separate paper?

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion covered issues that were not mentioned in the results section especially with regard to patients’ opinions and matters of interactions and information transfer between health institutions. In fact, the article became clearer in the discussion than in methods and results sections which created imbalanced support for the data.

Suggestion is to expand the results section with more explanations to both interviews and questionnaires results rather than to depend only on the figures.

The topic is very important and deserves to be presented in a better way. Please check the points above with regard to methods and results.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

1. Limitations with regard to sampling (purposefully or convenience samples depending on what authors actually used) needs to be mentioned.
2. Talk about transferability and trustworthiness need be done for the qualitative part of this study and also data saturation need to be discussed.
3. Need to talk more why the authors used this unusual combined method for data collection
4. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building both published and unpublished?

This section is Ok.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

This will be more accurate after re-writing the article according to the comments

9. Is the writing acceptable?

The writing is acceptable

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable
Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests