Reviewer's report

Title: Competence and attitudes towards patients with suicidal behaviour: A survey of general practitioners, psychiatrists and internists

Version: 2
Date: 25 March 2014

Reviewer: Karolina Krysinska

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review a manuscript reporting results of a study looking at medical professionals’ attitudes towards suicide in Norway. The topic of the study is important for clinical practice and suicide prevention, and identifying variables affecting these attitudes allows development and provision of tailored professional training and education.

Unfortunately, the manuscript has a number of minor and major limitations making it unsuitable for publication in its current form:

• Major Compulsory Revisions

1. There is confusion in the text regarding the very subject of medical professionals’ attitudes. The authors mention “suicidal behaviour” (eg title, items 9-12 of the study questionnaire), “suicide attempters” (eg USP), “suicidal patients” (p. 13), “people with suicidal behaviour” (p. 19) or “suicide” (eg three questions from the ATSQ). Could the authors specify the topic of their study and revise introduction and discussion of the results accordingly? For instance, management of patients after a suicide attempt might require other set of knowledge and skills than “the competence to detect suicidal risk” (p. 15) or general skills for the “assessment and management of suicide risk” (p. 18). Also, it is not clear how the internists work with patients after a suicide attempt.

2. Could the authors provide a) a rationale for including the group of internists in the study sample, b) criteria for the selection of the “various disorders” in the questionnaire, and c) reason for including “irritation” as a reaction when working with different groups of patients? Also, how can the authors be sure that the phrases “incurable illness”, “personal commitment”, and “level of empathy” were understood and interpreted in the same way by study participants representing different medical specialisations? Did all the study participants know the term “suicidology”? How did the inclusion of a number of other psychiatric and somatic diagnoses improve the quality and the practical implications of the reported study?

3. Could the authors provide more background information on the medical professionals attitudes towards suicide and euthanasia in case of an “incurable illness” (p. 4).

4. Variable “patients’ suicide in own practice” is not presented in study aims (p. 5) or in the study methodology (p. 7).

5. Could the authors provide more information about the “cross-sectional”
methodology of the survey (p. 5)?
6. Do all the USP items measure the same variable or are there subscales? How reliable were the scales used in the study?
7. Could the authors clarify the sentence starting with “Physicians in general practice (GP), psychiatry…”, especially “(…) and even completed suicide” (p. 4)?
8. What is the scientific value of reporting results in section “self-perceived competence” (p. 11), especially in sentences starting with “The psychiatrists reported…”, “The competence scores reported by GPs…”, and “All physicians reported…”. Similarly, the result “The levels of competence and commitment tended to align with the physicians’ area of specialisation” (p. 13) seems very “common sense”. Which findings does the sentence “These findings have not to our knowledge been presented before” (p. 13) refer to?
9. What do the authors mean by “patients with other types of co morbidity” (p. 19)?
10. A number of references is relatively “old”, eg, Colson et al. (1986) and Creed and Pfeffer (1981), Hawton et al. (1981). Are there more recent studies reporting results of interest for this study?

• Minor Essential Revisions
1. Please, correct a number of sentences in the manuscript, including “among them the internists and males were…” (Abstract), “physicians attribute various status to…” (pp. 3-4), and “The skill level on this issue was the lowest…” (p. 13).
2. Could the authors explain the values provided in the paragraph starting with “Items from the USP…” (p. 9)?
3. Page 13: please specify: “(…) results from the present study show that physicians report more positive attitudes [in comparison to…], and willingness to help”.
4. Please, check publication date of Saunders et al.
5. Was the result “Sixty-one percent of doctors…” found in the current study or in the study of Kovess-Masfety et al. (p. 15)?
6. Please, check spelling throughout the text (eg, “physichian”, “suicical”) and provide full reference for “(2004). National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health…” (p. 20). There is repetition in the answer options: “To a rather high degree” twice in item 7 of the questionnaire.
7. Could the authors check the number of items in point 13 of the questionnaire (14 items) and in the description of the questionnaire on pp. 5-6 (11 UPS items + 2 “education” items = 13 items)?
8. Please, remove “Note: It is possible…” (p. 5).
9. Please, add description: "means" and "SD" to explain the presented values in Table 2.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

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

**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'