Reviewer's report

Title: The care of patients with subthreshold depression in primary care: Is it all that bad? A qualitative study on the views of general practitioners and patients

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Reviewer: Pim P Cuijpers

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a paper about a qualitative study among general practitioners and patients about subthreshold depression. Although the study has some merits, it also suffers from several important limitations, which should be addressed before publication is possible.

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

* A major problem of this study is that the GP's selected the patients. The authors acknowledge that in their Discussion, but they do not oversee the consequences of this. Possibly, a majority of patients with subthreshold depression are not diagnosed by their GP, and possibly these patients have very different views about their GP. This study does not rule this possibility out in any way. It would have been much better to screen some patients in the waiting room and select the ones with subthreshold depression.
* The citations are too elaborative. I would suggest that the authors reduce the text of the Results section to half of what it is now. The points they make can also be made without all this text.
* The English language is very bad. The text should be edited considerably by a native speaker.
* The authors should describe the limitations of this study much more elaborately. I already mentioned the fact that only patients who were diagnosed by their GP were included. Another important limitation if that this study was conducted in a small region in Germany, and may not be generalized to other countries. For example, St John's wort is not routinely prescribed in many other countries outside Germany.
* The relation between the GP and the patient is stressed as an important issue in several parts of the paper. This is of course an important aspect, but should not be overestimated. Especially because here only patients were selected by the GP. It is no wonder that these patients stress their good relation with their GP. But what about the other patients with subthreshold depression who were not diagnosed by their GP, or who do not have a good relation.
* On the second page of the Discussion section (the paper has no pages), at the top, the authors say that the validity of the diagnosis strategy of the GP is confirmed by the fact that the patients had some form of current or past depression. First, this is not specified in the results section of the paper (only current diagnoses are reported). Second, 5 of the 24 patients (more than 20%!) had no diagnosis at all! That is not just something!
* At the third page of the Discussion section, the authors say that they could not confirm the finding from other studies that GP's make no difference between the treatment of subthreshold and threshold depression. They can not make such a statement without examining also how patients with threshold depression are treated.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

* The Abstract overestimates the results of this study, when it is said that Past criticisms must partly be turned down. That can be done on the basis of a qualitative study, aimed at generating hypotheses.
* In the Introduction, the authors should mention that minor depression is a diagnostic category in the ICD, which is used in primary care more than the DSM.
* More information should be given about the diagnostic status of the patients. Was only the mood disorder section of the SCID taken, or also other sections? Were there no patients with dysthymia? Did not of the patients have an anxiety disorder, or a personality disorder?
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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