Reviewer’s report

Title: Barriers to Healthcare Utilization in Fatiguing Illness: A Population-Based Study in Georgia

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Reviewer: Hyong Jin Cho

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript has been substantially improved. The design of the study combining quantitative and qualitative approaches is an important strength: documenting the barrier for CFS patients and exploring the possible reasons for that barrier.

However, I am not sure whether the “symptom-targeted model” is soundly based on the data or thoughtfully inferred from the findings. The authors mention on relationships among the symptoms, CFS history and healthcare utilization in Discussion section, but it is hard to figure out how they came to the “symptom-targeted model” from these findings. Maybe the main finding (current CFS status associated with the barrier) led the authors to this particular model. Anyway, it is unclear how this model was derived or inferred from the data.

The authors could briefly but more clearly describe the “paradoxical” findings on PCS and MCS in Results section and discuss them in Discussion section (interpreting the findings in a more conservative tone).

A minor point is about the use of the p-value 0.01 as the threshold. The authors’ attempt for scientific rigor is laudable. However, as there is a clear main outcome now and the purpose of the secondary outcomes is to further explore the main outcome, the use of 0.05 seems acceptable. I mention this because if you want to be really rigorous, you need to use 99% CI rather than 95% CI. I guess adopting 99% CI will require more work from the authors and I don’t think it is necessary. Of course, although you officially adopt P<0.05, you can still mention that most findings were also backed by P<0.01.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.