Reviewer's report

Title: Does computer use pose a hazard for future long-term sickness absence?

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Reviewer number: 1

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This research group is well known for the care it takes and the high quality of its studies. I was not surprised, therefore, to read another good example of their work. This study is carefully designed, well conducted and well executed.

A particular strength is their capacity to obtain an objective measure of computer usage time and to link this with objective data on the outcome of interest – in this case, sickness absence.

Major revisions
None

Minor revisions
1. The finding is not as surprising as in the earlier paper showing a lack of association between pain and computer use – particularly as sickness absence is a complex sociological phenomenon with numerous non-occupational determinants. Nonetheless, the findings are useful to confirm. This is a brief report, sparsely described; but it might be useful to expand the discussion a little to give this context.

2. One area of relative weakness (acknowledged by the authors) is that they cannot distinguish the medical reasons for sickness absence. One might expect – if anything – an association with musculoskeletal sickness absence and not with sickness absence of other causes. Thus, there is potential for an association with musculoskeletal sickness absence to be missed because it is diluted by measuring all-cause sickness absence. I would like to see a bit more discussion of the issue.

3. Another area of uncertainty I had (which perhaps betrays my lack of understanding of the maths) concerned the timing of exposure relative to outcomes. One might expect that spells of musculoskeletal absence follow fairly shortly after peaks in demand and heavier than usual use of the keyboard, rather than haphazardly in timing relative to average use. If there are enough peaks and troughs in computer use (variability), could the authors test a model that relates peaks to short-lagged sickness absence (e.g. sickness in the next week)? I doubt this would alter the findings, but might further underpin the conclusions.

In general, however, this is an excellent paper.
**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.