Reviewer’s report

Title: Toward the Future of Psychiatric Diagnosis: The Seven Pillars of RDoC

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Reviewer: Assen Jablensky

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Major essential revisions. This reviewer has no major comments on the sections entitled Background and Discussion. These two sections are important, conceptually sound, and the ideas they convey are clearly articulated. I have a couple of comments on the section entitled “The seven pillars” and the related Table 2. (1) It would be important to state that the current five groups of research domain criteria are ‘moving targets’ – they represent the current consensus of experts on the present state of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, and are therefore provisional, open to revision. It is also very likely that new RDoCs will be added in the future. (2) On page 12, the authors state that RDoC “incorporates and explicitly dimensional approach to psychopathology”, and that “in contrast to views that emphasize dimensionality mostly as a function of symptom severity, RDoC explicitly is committed to studying the ‘full range of variation, from normal to abnormal”’. I think the main issue here is that current proposals of psychopathological ‘dimensions’ (e.g. those for psychotic symptoms in DSM-5) lack true quantitation of the phenomena and use low-level ordinal scaling. The aim of RDoC should be to introduce variables amenable to higher-order scaling (interval or ratio). This needs to be stated. (3) I would like to see an enriched Table 2. At present it contains only labels of the constructs, without examples of specific measurable variables referring to specific, even if still tentative, brain networks or genomic pathways.

(4) In the second paragraph of the Background section on page 3, beginning with “The second major revision…”, the use of the word ‘promulgated’ by the World Health Organization…” in respect of ICD-11, is not appropriate. A better usage would be ‘being developed’ by the World Health Organization. (5) On page 7, middle of the top paragraph, the statement ‘the two nosologies [referring to DSM/ICD] are nearly identical in terms of the actual listing of disorders’ is not quite accurate – a preferable phrase would be ‘largely overlapping’.

(6) In the section entitled Research Domain Criteria, the first two sentences contain typos (‘healthy’ should be health; ‘current’ should be currently). (7) On page 13, middle of bottom paragraph, the sentence “In particular, once again the zones of marginal psychopathology, with their potential for understanding proximate etiology and for indicated prevention, receive short shrift”. It is not made clear what constitutes ‘marginal psychopathology’, and how it would help the understanding of etiology.

Declaration of competing interests:
The present reviewer has no competing interest in relation to this manuscript.