Reviewer’s report

Title: Self-prescribing among young doctors: a nine-year follow-up study of a nationwide sample

Version: 1 Date: 18 August 2005

Reviewer: Elisabeth Paice

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General
This paper addresses an important but little researched subject: self-prescribing among doctors. The subjects were well-described, and the response rate was low but as expected for the subject group. The method was appropriate. The discussion and conclusions were appropriate. The references were well researched, relevant and comprehensive.

Inevitably there were things I would have liked to have known which are missing. It may be that these are not known, but in that case their absences are weaknesses that should be acknowledged in the discussion.

1. Table 1 does not have a category for ‘have got some prescription medication from another physician’. I am therefore not clear whether those who self-prescribed did so exclusively or also got medications from another physician – eg perhaps occasionally self-prescribing a contraceptive or an antibiotic for a trivial illness but normally seeking help when ill. Equally some distressed doctors who often self-prescribe may also frequently seek help.

2. There is no indication of whether or not the doctors were registered with a general practitioner, or ever saw one, and whether or not this was associated with self-prescription. Since most papers on this topic conclude that we should ensure all doctors register from the start with a GP, this omission is important.

3. There was no information about doctors who no longer practised medicine. Was this because these could not be traced, they did not exist or they formed too small a group to mention? It is possible that either very high or very low levels of self-prescription might be associated with leaving medicine, and it would be interesting to know.

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Accept for publication in BMC Medicine after minor essential revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interest.