Reviewer's report

Title: An Evaluation of Exclusionary Medical/Psychiatric Conditions in the Definition of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Version: 1 Date: 16 June 2009

Reviewer: Roseanne Armitage

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Revisions

The manuscript focuses on an important clinical research area. It is well written and concise and the methods are appropriate for the question under consideration.

There are some areas when the manuscript needs to be improved.

In the Background section, the comment about excluding certain psychiatric illnesses because patients may not be competent to participate in studies really should be removed. Any participant who cannot give informed consent, regardless of the diagnosis should not be included in research. The diagnosis of a psychiatric illness should not be equated with incompetence.

In that same paragraph... Why would MMD with melancholic features be exclusionary but non-melancholia would not?

There is too little information about Table 1 in the Results section. There is a very limited discussion of the odds ratios and no comment on the use of adjusted or unadjusted odds ratios. What does bold font indicate in the table? Abbreviations need to be spelled out in a footnote and the text of the Results section should really highlight what is important in the table.

All of the Tables need to have abbreviations defined in a footnote.

Why were other psychiatric illnesses evaluated by telephone, but not MDD? Is Anxiety or Trauma included in the Other category or was it evaluated? Did the telephone interview query symptoms or diagnosed illness? It might be useful to identify the form of the questions used in telephone interview.

Does the Sleep Disorders category also include insomnia?

What is the n in each group in Table 4? The organization of the table is rather difficult to follow. Clearly, the goal is to define the most prevalent exclusions in each category, but the reader is also going to be interested in comparing across categories. It might be easier to order the conditions across group.

Table 5: it would be helpful to bold the font on significant differences. The meaning of the p adjustment in the footnote is not clear. Adjusted for the number
of variables or the comparisons between groups or both, i.e. an experiment-wise p<.05? It would seem to be most meaningful to adjust for all comparisons and highlight those that are significant by an experiment-wise p<.05.

Table 6 seems unnecessary since only BMI remained significant after adjustment.

The first sentence on page 15 is awkward and should be broken into two separate sentences.

**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**: Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.