Reviewer’s report

Title: Mental health and substance use disorders in frequent users of a general Swiss emergency department were largely underdiagnosed by emergency physicians

Version: 1
Date: 13 July 2015

Reviewer: Mary Mackesy-Amiti

Reviewer’s report:

This study 1) assessed and compared rates of psychiatric and substance use disorders in two groups of emergency department (ED) patients, frequent users and non-frequent users, 2) compared rates of disorders assessed by concurrent screening with rates obtained by retrospective medical chart review, and 3) evaluated the contribution of mental health and substance use disorders to the likelihood of frequent vs. non-frequent ED use. The research question is well-defined and the methods seem to be appropriate. The description of the research methods is somewhat lacking. The discussion and conclusions are adequately supported, and the limitations are clearly stated. The writing is in need of some improvement. Specific recommendations are noted below.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Methods, 2nd paragraph:

1. The use of the term prospective here is somewhat confusing. Please clarify if the current study is using baseline data from an ongoing prospective study, or if this is simply a cross-sectional study with concurrent and retrospective data collection.

2. Please include more detail about the sample selection and indicate the proportion of all visits that were identified as frequent users.

3. It is not clear whether data collected during the pilot phase are included in this report.

4. Please include information about how and when patients were recruited for the study.

5. The article cited for the detailed study protocol is listed as submitted. If the article is not yet published or at least “in press” it is not appropriate to refer the reader to it.

6. Measurements: “For the cross-sectional and prospective study...”: again, it is not clear that there is any prospective data collection involved in this study.

7. Data Analysis, 1st sentence. Table references belong in the results section.

8. Results, 1st paragraph: Please clarify on what other socio-demographic characteristics the two groups were compared.
9. Results, 4th paragraph: I found this sentence unclear; please rephrase to clarify that the AOR are for comorbid and psychiatric disorder only groups vs. no disorder. What about the substance use only group?

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Methods, 2nd paragraph: “Research assistants submitted a screening questionnaire…”: I think the authors mean to say “administered” rather than “submitted.” Saying “submitted” makes it sound as if the questionnaire was self-administered. Please revise throughout.

2. Results, 4th paragraph: These are not “psychiatric patients”, but ED patients who screened positive for a psychiatric disorder.

3. Figure 1: Remove “PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder” from the figure title

4. Discussion, 5th paragraph, line 156: “we found that psychiatric patients…” should be “we found that ED patients who screened positive for a psychiatric disorder…”

Discretionary Revisions

1. Background: The 2nd-4th sentences of the 1st paragraph seem out of place.

2. Methods, 2nd paragraph: I suggest placing information about the general design of the study in the first paragraph, before information about the groups.

3. Figures 2 & 3: I would prefer to see proportions rather than numbers.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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