Reviewer’s report

Title: Occupational burnout and empathy influence blood pressure control in primary care physicians

Version: 1 Date: 31 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Agnes Tiwari

Reviewer's report:

1. Background - while the authors have provided an account on the association between empathy and burnout, there seems to be a sudden jump to blood pressure control. A stronger case needs to be made as to why the focus is on blood pressure control, among the clinical outcomes.

2. Participants - what is the sample size calculation based on? Is it based on a prior similar study?

3. Instruments - please provide more details about the instruments including the psychometric properties. Also, please explain the cut-off scores for each of the questionnaires.

4. Data analysis - other than burnout and empathy, what steps were taken to detect if the observed associations may be affected by spurious variables?

5. Discussion - the claim that better BP control was observed in patients under the care of primary care physicians and nurses with high empathy and low burnout is questionable. Earlier, the authors actually said that "physicians with low levels of empathy had a significantly higher proportion of patients with adequate BP management" and "we found no differences between adequacy of BP management according to level of burnout".

Also, BP management is a complex phenomenon and the patients themselves are likely to play an important role in it. The authors have not made a stronger enough case to argue that 'better' BP management is related to high empathy/low burnout.
I find that the results are not adequate to support the conclusion of this study. The limitations that were mentioned clearly highlighted the facts. Therefore, in view of that I find it difficult to accept the conclusions drawn from this paper as the results may not be valid.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal