Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence of anal symptoms in general practice: a prospective study

Version: 0 Date: 16 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Guido Schmiemann

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The aim of this study is to assess the prevalence of anal symptoms and their management in general practice. 1315 consecutive patients from 59 GP were included and assessed with a self administered questionnaire.

The topic and the results are interesting and important for the primary care setting. The method choosen is adequate, nevertheless there are yet some shortcomings in the description I would suggest to revise.

L 51

I do not understand the sentence- what does the appropriate role refer to?

The general practitioner's (GP) role in the management of anal disorders seems appropriate

L57-59

According to the literature cited a huge and recent observational study has already been performed in France. The authors should add a reason for yet another study with the same research question. Conducting the study with different GPs in a different region is no sufficient explanation

L 71

GP recruitment. It remains unclear if proctologists were recruited first and surrounding GPs afterwards or vice versa. What does "seven centres" mean, are these GP practices in the catchment area of the participating proctologists?

L 77

Patients were included over 1 to 2 days of consultation - was the time period choosen by the GPs or defined by the researcher? Who decided which days were used for inclusion? Did every GP include only patients on one or two days?

L84

on a 0 to 10 scale. What kind of scale was used? A visual analog scale?
Please expand on the symptoms assessed and how they were assessed (open questions? lists of symptoms to be ticked? Was a pretest conducted?)

Anal examination was proposed to all 86 symptomatic patients or offered?

How were reasons for not contacting a proctologist assessed? Telephone follow up?

I would suggest to describe the sample size calculation in a different order, starting with the size needed to prove the research question.

There is a mismatch between the participating GP- in the methods section is stated, that 15 GPs were needed, but 80 were recruited. This is a contradiction to the aim of a sample size calculation, please explain the difference. Did you expect a lower recruiting rate?

Which doctors were contacted, were they chosen from a list of all doctors in the area? Was the potential difference between GPs practicing in rural vs urban setting taken into account?

What does the "preselection" by GPs mean? Were any other factor beside the inclusion criteria and consecutive approach used?

Is it possible to make a diagnosis without an anal examination?

Diagnostic instead of diagnosis

Spontaneously reported instead of consulted?

"shows the benefit" - there is no evidence for a benefit presented, I would suggest to stay with the description only. The issue of a benefit should be discussed more critically- is there any evidence, that patient care / relevant outcomes are improved, when systematically assessing anal
complaints? Stating that an anal cancer might be detected or scarring in patients with anal fissure might be prevented seems to me quite weak when proposing a general anal exam.

L270 ..was considered major.. to assess this information the rating scale (minor/major?) would be helpful. I could not find any results of the assessment of discomfort in this study as stated in the discussion (average or high in 43%).

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.

Yes

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

Yes

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 recommend additional statistical review

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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