Author’s response to reviews

Title: Constipation and laxative use among people living in nursing homes in 2007 and 2013

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you for the valuable comments. We have now made a new revision taking into account the comments from the reviewer and the editor.

Editor Comments:

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Please provide heading for 'Declarations' section

Thank you, we have provided this heading.

Please provide Acknowledgements
We have not provided this, since we have no acknowledgements.

Please point-by-point response and track changes

Thank you, we have provided point-by-point responses and tracked changes in the manuscript. We have also submitted a clean manuscript.

Reviewer reports:

Per Farup (Reviewer 1): The paper has markedly improved. I still have some comments.

The definition of constipation poses problems since patients who were satisfactorily treated for constipation have not been classified as having constipation. The authors have explained why, and that is OK, but it has to be taken into account when evaluating the results. Another problem is the use of laxatives. It is not clear in the method section if only regular use of laxatives was registered or if "as needed" use was included. The discussion gives the impression that "as needed" use was not registered. Please clarify in the method section. The registration period was one week. Was a patient given laxatives twice ("as needed") during the registration week classified as using laxatives? In general, the wording in the paper could be improved.

Thank you for these comments. We have included one sentence regarding the definition of constipation in the limitation part. We have also clarified in the method section that only regular use of medications were registered in this study and that the patients registered as having laxatives were those that had a prescription of regular use of laxatives at the time of collection of data.

We have also sent the manuscript to a professional proof-reader.

Specific comments to the different parts:

Abstract.

Line 43. According to what I have written above, I prefer: "The prevalence of unsatisfactory relief of constipation among……"

Lines 46-47: "…in the regular use of"

Lines 56-59. I miss an important message in the conclusion and in the paper. Since the prevalence of unsatisfactory relief of constipation had increased significantly, the overall conclusion, independent of the use of opioids, is that the treatment of constipation has deteriorated from 2007 to 2013.
We would like to suggest the wording “symptoms of constipation” instead of “unsatisfactory relief”, as unsatisfactory relief seems to imply that there is ongoing treatment but that the treatment is not effective. This is of course sometimes the case, but not always. As we have, in fact, measured symptoms, we think that wording is better grounded in the data. We also think the conclusion that treatment has deteriorated is not fully supported by the data. There could be other reason other than deteriorated treatment for an increase, such as comorbidities etc. We have made a revision of the abstract that hopefully could be accepted by the reviewer.

Results:

Lines 216-217: The overall use of laxatives cannot be corrected for anything, but the difference is statistically significant after correction for sex……. Rewrite the sentence.

Thank you, the sentence is rewritten.

Line 248. Table 5. Despite a higher prevalence of laxative users in 2013 than in 2007 (77% vs 57%) the prevalence of constipation was higher in 2013 than in 2007 (50% vs 46%). Please discuss. Could it be due to the use of less effective laxatives in 2013 or more use of opioids?

Thank you, we have added some sentences about this in the discussion part.

The line "Residents rated constipated without laxatives" with calculation of p-value is superfluous and should be removed since the numbers are indirectly written in the line above. I recommend you to revise the table and include the proportion of residents with constipation in the groups with and without the use of laxatives. The last line in the table gives little meaning to me. Patients without constipation and not using laxatives (49% in 2007 and 26% in 2013) do not need laxatives.

We agree, but in order not to confuse the reader we have removed the line “Residents rated constipated with laxatives instead, since the numbers of “Residents rated constipated without laxatives” are reported in the abstract. We hope this is ok for the reviewer. We hope we have understood the reviewer right and have now only included the proportion of residents with constipation without the use of laxatives.

Discussion:

The discussion is long and little to the point and without clear relevance to the aims of the study. An example is the discussion of the effects of and the differences between the various laxatives, which is less relevant in the paper. Focus the discussion on the aims of the study, the clinical significance of the findings and propose practical consequences for clinical use.

We have removed some parts of the discussion and added some other parts. We think this has improved the manuscript and hope the reviewer agrees.
Conclusion:

Do not repeat the aims. Clarify the findings, including the fact that the overall treatment of constipation has deteriorated.

Thank you, we have changed the conclusion according to your suggestion.

Hanne Konradsen (Reviewer 2): I believe that the authors have adequately addressed the comments from the first review, and that the document now is ready for publication

Thank you very much for these words.