Reviewer's report

Title: Patterns of Initiation of Second Generation Antipsychotics for Bipolar Disorder: A Month-by-Month Analysis of Provider Behavior, 2004-2010

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Reviewer: Andrea Pfennig

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript is concerned with a very important question, namely what variables influence clinical decision making regarding prescription of SGA. It uses data from the well-known large VA database. However, I have several concerns:

Overall the fact that some of the SGA are recommended by up-to-date international guidelines as one of the first choice options in mania and bipolar depression is not really mentioned but could explain that the prescription frequency raised within the last years.

The abstract does not really report the primary outcomes in a balanced way. The study was interested in variables influence clinical decision making regarding prescription of SGA. However, the results on demographic and clinical variables with significant influence are not mentioned in the abstract (e.g., psychotic features, anti-manic prescriptions). In the abstract, the focus is on the doubling of prescription frequency, even so in the main text it is mentioned that also cases of bipolar disorder raised significantly and that overall there is even a slight decrease in the annual prescription odds. And in the abstract there is mentioned that prescriptions were widened to less complex cases, a fact that I could hardly find validly shown in the results section. The regional differences found were not as large in figures than one could suggest from the highlightning in the abstract.

There are errors in the description of the years and numbers included etc.: in the abstract fiscal years 2003-2010 are mentioned, in the title and one figure (2) only 2004-2010 are mentioned. The number of patients without prior SGA use is 133,510 in the abstract and 113,510 in the text.

I recommend that the authors respond to the commentaries and revise their discussion/conclusions and abstract and submit a revised version.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I did receive financial support for an IIT from AstraZeneca (2010-2012) and speakers honoraria from AstraZeneca and Lundbeck (2010-2013).