

Reviewer's report

Title: "Placebo effect is probably what we refer to as patient healing power." A qualitative pilot study examining how Norwegian complementary therapists reflects on their practice

Version: 0 Date: 15 Nov 2016

Reviewer: Felicity Bishop

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript addresses an important and interesting topic for CAM researchers and practitioners - the nature of the consultation. I recommend the following revisions.

1. The introduction provides a general overview but tends to rely on jargon and complex constructs without explaining it for the reader. This section would benefit from removing/defining such terms. For example - unspecific effects (line 50-51, these are more commonly known as non-specific effects), 'raising consciousness and activate the patient self-healing power' (lines 53-54), 'contextual healing' (line 85).
2. The referencing in the introduction is somewhat lacking, with many strong claims not supported by reference to evidence, e.g. "Complementary therapists emphasize the importance of collecting information about the patients' previous and current life ..." (lines 57-60). "all modalities emphasize the importance of consultations" (lines 51-2). "Most of the studies conclude that a fruitful relationship between therapists and patients may have positive influence on the treatment outcome." (lines 81-83).
3. A body of work on patients' perspectives on complementary medicine consultations is rather dismissed in the introduction in a single sentence - Complementary consultations have mainly been explored emphasizing the patients' experiences based on interviews and survey questionnaires. - that provides no insight into the findings from this literature. Such findings would seem pertinent to the current manuscript given that the object of interest is the consultation (even if only included briefly to better contextualise the findings on practitioners' perspectives).
4. The study is entitled a pilot study but very little justification for this is developed in the text and the value of such a very small qualitative study with very short observational periods is not clearly articulated. I appreciate that qualitative methods are well-suited to examining social phenomena in depth and that small sample sizes can facilitate such in-depth detailed work. However one week is a very short observation period (raising potential problems in terms of observer effects, difficulties gaining an 'insider' perspective in such a short time, demand effects, etc.) and single interviews with four therapists plus the same therapists in a single focus group feels rather light to me. I would like to see the authors articulate in the manuscript a rationale for such a small study and a clear appreciation of its limitations. It is shame that the observational data were not formally incorporated into the analyses, rendering the findings based primarily on just 4 interviews and a single focus group with the same interviewees. The lack of inclusion of

observational data in the findings somewhat weakens the claim made in the Discussion that the use of several data collection approaches strengthens the internal validity.

5. The data collection and analysis appear to have been conducted to a good standard and are clearly articulated although the terms 'conventional and direct' (line 178) content analysis are ambiguous and should be defined, otherwise a reader would have difficulty replicating the methods. The findings are primarily descriptive with good use of illustrative quotes.

6. The Discussion would benefit from reflecting on how the findings from this study compare to other studies that have examined complementary practitioners' (and ideally patients') perspectives on the consultation and mechanisms of action more broadly, given the theme around contextual effects.

7. The conclusions in the main paper and the abstract are too strongly worded and too broad-ranging given the very small and limited sample of participants. It is not appropriate to generalise from this study to all "complementary consultations".

8. On the whole the writing is clear but the manuscript does need to be revised for English language, preferably by a native English speaker.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?

If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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