Reviewer's report

Title: Cost effectiveness of epidural steroid injections to manage chronic lower back pain

Version: 3 Date: 24 July 2012

Reviewer: Alyn Lewis

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

The paper still lacks clarity. The overall objective of the initial trial was clearly detailed – but the objective of this secondary study (using data from the primary trial) needs to be clearly stated. As I understand it, this study is a before-and-after comparison over two time intervals – with data combined from these two intervals (to address whether ESI including the after- data (compared to non-use of ESI based on before-data) is cost-effective. This clearly can be confusing to the reader and needs to be made explicitly clear at the outset of the Methods section.

In terms of clarity, could the authors detail exactly their method of calculating CIs for the cost-utility analysis – this needs to be clear as it is based on the joint distribution of costs and QALYs. I am not sure that this is what was done (and would be misleading if done otherwise).

Abstract: the lower bound for the CI is -0.019 not 0.019 (otherwise it would be statistically significant)!

Methods (last sentence of Methods section, top of page 6): The authors state “Incremental cost effectiveness ratios were calculated as utility gains relative to the estimated cost of the procedure”. I think this should be “were calculated as estimated cost of the procedure relative to utility gains” (as is the usual format for cost-effectiveness reporting).

Minor revision

Page 6: CIs are presented the wrong way round – the lower bound always comes first and the upper bound second e.g. 0.09 – 0.37 (not 0.37 – 0.09).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

No conflict of interest.