Reviewer's report

Title: Acupuncture is a feasible treatment for post-thoracotomy pain: Results of a prospective pilot trial

Version: 1 Date: 31 December 2005

Reviewer: Hugh MacPherson

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-written paper that covers what it sets out to do in an appropriate way. Many pilot studies over sell their results, which this paper explicitly does not do. I have a few minor comments:

· The abstract should include the number invited, showing the number (proportion) who participate, which is also a measure of acceptability that will impact on recruitment to a large-scale RCT.
· In the Methods, the rationale for using these specific locations of acupuncture points is not well covered. And the association between these points and traditional acupuncture points is not discussed. The role of Kotani’s study in informing this one is not properly discussed in the Methods, though Kotani’s study is mentioned in passing in the Comments section regarding the length of time of which acupuncture was provided. Really this should be set out in the Methods section.
· The last sentence of the first paragraph on page 7 discusses the use of metal balls, arguing that they are used for the reason that they do not penetrate the skin. This is not a good argument, as logically it could be applied to all points at all times in the trial. The authors need to provide a better rationale for using metal balls that does not undermine the case for using auricular needles earlier on in the study.
· A “modified” pain inventory (BPI) was used, but no explanation of how the BPI was modified, and the implications of this modification in term of validity and reliability of data.
· Page 11, first paragraph, it should be reiterated here that the decreasing severity of pain over time is possibly due to a number of factors, such as natural history, and that this study explicitly does not demonstrate that the improvement is due to the acupuncture.
· The title of the Tables should be more self-explanatory. This applies particularly to Table 2 and 3 where the actual scale used should be provided, and the units given, with a note to say that reduction is related to improvement.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'