Reviewer’s report

Title: Comparing Recruitment Strategies in a Study of Acupuncture for Chronic Back Pain

Version: 1 Date: 22 September 2009

Reviewer: Maria Hondras

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

None.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Methods, 1st paragraph, last sentence, change were to was, to read: “The positive impact… was still evident at 52 weeks.”

2. Methods, Outcome Measures, Treatment completion and loss to follow-up: add “for the acupuncture groups” to the end of the parenthetical phrase, to read: “(characterized in this report as none, 1 to 7, or 8 to 10 for the acupuncture groups)”

3. Author affiliations: Cap “C” on Center for Khalsa.

4. Outcome Measures, Baseline characteristics, 2nd line: delete one of the double commas.

5. Outcome Measures, Follow-up outcomes, 7th line: “was measured by asking participants to rate how bothersomeness their pain had been…”

5.1. either change to read “to rate how bothersome”

5.2. or change to read “to rate the bothersomeness of their pain”

6. Primary Outcomes by Recruitment Strategy, add a period at end of 1st sentence.

7. Conclusion: insert ‘with’ to read, “The characteristics of persons with chronic LBP…”

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Results, Response Rates by Recruitment Strategy

1.1. Although one can review details elsewhere, it would be helpful to state the number of months (or start/end dates) for recruitment and enrollment.

1.2. Are the data reported here “response rates” or “disposition of responses to recruitment efforts?” It would be helpful to know: how many mailed invitation letters were sent to generate 859 responses; the mailing stages; and, the number
of repeat mailings. Also, how many magazine advertisements were placed in the “health plan’s quarterly magazine” during the trial?

1.3. Table 1, Usual care: were there any assessments from electronic health records for the number and types of provider visits for participants in the Usual Care arm of the trial? Although the intent of the table is to display a priori treatment adherence in the acupuncture groups, consider a description (in the text?) of the number (and types?) of treatment visits for participants in the Usual care group as well.

2. Discussion, paragraph 2 and reference 8:

The phrase “unselected population from a pain clinic” is awkward when participants were selected, at least for analysis in that report. Further on, the next sentence states “between the populations recruited using these different methods…” Perhaps the authors can revise the 2nd sentence, as I believe the comparison in the study cited was between patients recruited for a clinical trial and “routine pain clinic patients.”

3. Finally, the Introduction section mentions “the opportunity to use multiple recruitment strategies in one of the study locations.” Although references 4 and 5 are cited in the Methods, I did not see recruitment, enrollment, and follow-up information provided “by study site.” The authors might consider a description about the recruitment methods at the second site. Did the second site reach their recruitment and enrollment goals with letters alone or were multiple methods used? [NB: if you add this information, the Abstract, Methods, 1st sentence could be revised to read: “… data from participants recruited to one site for a clinical trial…”]

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

(non-financial disclosure) One of the authors serves on the Data and Safety Monitoring Committee at the institution where I serve as co-investigator for several clinical trials.