Reviewer's report

Title: Complementary or alternative? The use of homeopathic products and antibiotics amongst pre-school children

Version: 1 Date: 1 July 2007

Reviewer: Heather Boon

Reviewer's report:

General
Interesting idea for a study.

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

Abstract - conclusion: "Use of homeopathic products was not associated with increases or decreased antibiotic consumption, suggesting that promoting homeopathic medicines as an alternative to antibiotics, while potentially important, needs to be further investigated." -- this conclusion goes far beyond the data presented in the paper which simply tell us there is no association between antibiotic use and homeopathic medicine use. The phrase "while potentially important" should be removed as the study sheds no light on the importance or efficacy of homeopathy as an alternative to antibiotics. I am also not sure that the data tell us that further investigation is necessary -- why if there is no association? I would like to see the conclusion limited to what the data actually show.

Background - medicine, antibiotic and health services use among pre-school children: this section focuses on the "high" use of antibiotics -- arguing that it is too high, but fails to make a key point -- it is not the high use of antibiotics per se that is the problem, but rather high use of unnecessary or inappropriately prescribed antibiotics for viral infections that is the problem. I think this point needs to be made explicitly (rather than implicitly) in this section.

p. 12 conclusion -- the re-statement of the study aim in the conclusion ("...to explore the ALSPAC dataset to determine if homeopathic products could be promoted as alternative to antibiotics...." -- is both fundamentally different from the original aim as stated earlier in the paper (which focused on looking for a possible association) and cannot in fact be answered with with this kind of survey data. Determining if homeopathic products can be promoted in place of antibiotics depends on knowing what the antibiotics are being prescribed for and the effectiveness of homeopathic for that indication -- all things missing from this survey data. As with the abstract conclusion, the conclusion in the body of the paper needs to be limited to the findings discussed.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**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:**

I declare that I have no competing interests