Reviewer’s report

Title: Homeopathic Treatment of Elderly Patients - A Prospective Observational Study with a Follow-Up over a two year period

Version: 2 Date: 17 August 2009

Reviewer: Vinjar Fonnebo

Reviewer’s report:

ABSTRACT:
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. The purpose of the study needs to be given identically in the abstract and introduction. This must be corrected.
2. Only the abstract gives the geographical location of the study. This also needs to be given in the methods section.
3. The abstract indicates that the physicians assessed the complaints of the patients. This is contradictory to the main text which indicates that the physicians only assessed their diagnosis.

INTRODUCTION
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. The last two sentences (lines 61-65) should be moved to the materials section.

MATERIAL AND METHODS
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. The authors need to describe how the participating physicians were recruited. From a register? A convenience sample? How many were approached, and how high a proportion agreed to participate?
2. The authors need to describe here in what setting the physicians were working. This is now presented first in the results section.
3. In the methods section it is indicated that the physicians were required to have "certified training in classical homeopathy". The authors need to indicate whether their practice also followed the principles of classical homeopathy.
4. The authors need to indicate whether some patients declined to participate in the study when approached.
5. "Consecutively" recruited could be interpreted as a 100% participation rate on behalf of the patients. Is this the case?
6. The authors indicate that the SF36 results are presented "in normalised scores". I can not see that in table 3, only the changes seem to be presented in both actual and normalised scores. This needs to be clarified.
7. The authors state that the questionnaires were distributed by the study
physicians. Is this the physician that treated them, or is the study physician a separate person? Needs to be clarified.

8. The baseline questionnaire was completed "prior to the start of therapy". How did the researchers ensure that the envelopes were sealed and sent before the patient saw the physician that treated them?

9. In the statistics section the authors should indicated that the 5 multiple imputed data tables relate to each participant (if that is the case).

10. In the statistics section the authors indicate that subgroup analyses were performed. This can not be found in the results section. This needs to be clarified or omitted.

11. The authors are writing about pooling of children's data. This study does not include children and this should be rectified.

12. The authors explain extensively how they are dealing regression-to-the-mean issues. I can not see that any results are presented in this area. This should also be rectified.

RESULTS
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. The second paragraph of the results describes the diagnoses made by the physician. The last sentence indicates that the patient's complaints are listed in table 2. But table 2 also only gives diagnoses. These needs to be clarified.

2. The results indicate that the patients received on average 6.1 homeopathic prescriptions. The authors need to inform us whether some of these were given simultaneously (violating the classical homeopathy principle).

3. The result text indicates that table 3 describes complaint severity (patient perspective) while the table describes diagnoses (physician perspective). Did the patients also rate the physician-generated diagnosis? This confusion needs to be rectified.

4. Table 3 includes 40 statistical tests (possibly with 12 twin tests). Why are the authors using a 95% confidence interval in this situation with multiple testing?

DISCUSSION
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. The discussion needs to be reorganized in the following sections: A. Brief recap of results, B. Bias considerations, C. Comparison with previous research, D. Implications, and possibly a conclusion.

2. Bias considerations (both selection and information) are almost non-existent. This needs to be covered appropriately.

3. One major topic that needs to be covered is relating the findings to studies from conventional medicine on how complaints develop after conventional treatment alone at the GP office.

TABLES/FIGURES
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. In table 1 the authors need to indicate how the last 2.7% of participants are living.
2. In table disease severity is given. They need to clarify that this is physician-evaluated (Am I right in assuming this?)
3. The legend to figure 1 needs to be corrected to indicate that it only relates to the study population. The legends to the other tables and figures also need to be flushed out so they are self-explanatory.

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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