Reviewer's report

Title: Complementary and Alternative Medicine use in oncology: A questionnaire survey of patients and health care professionals

Version: 1 Date: 19 October 2010

Reviewer: Felicity L Bishop

Reviewer's report:

In the interests of transparency I would like to disclose that I have reviewed this manuscript previously. It reports a study on an interesting topic, and has potential to contribute to the literature in this area. However, there are a number of rather significant limitations, some of which I have highlighted below. I consider all of these to be Major Compulsory Revisions.

1. The use of English needs to be improved. There are errors throughout the manuscript.
2. The use of many acronyms is distracting and unnecessary. While CAM is a well-known acronym, others that are used in this paper such as CP and NCV are not particularly helpful.
3. The setting for the survey (cross sectional survey conducted in a single hospital in Ireland) should be made clear in the abstract.
4. The ‘background’ section offers a somewhat sparse review of the existing literature which could be improved to better situate the present study, to justify the aims, and to more clearly delineate the specific contribution to knowledge that this study was intended to make.
5. The review of previous literature on HCPs’ views of CAM use for cancer is cursory and references no specific studies (“Few studies have been reported to date assessing the attitudes and perception…” – background paragraph 2). There are multiple studies published in well-known journals on oncologists’ and other health care professionals’ attitudes towards CAM in relation to oncology. It is not clear why they have not been reviewed in this introduction. For example: Hyodo et al 2003 Cancer Volume 97 Issue 11, Pages 2861 – 2868; Risberg et al 2004 European Journal of Cancer, Volume 40, Issue 4, Pages 529-535; Richardson et al 2004 Supportive Care in Cancer, 12, 797-804.
6. There is no clear justification for the broad focus on three distinct populations, none of which are particularly well defined: cancer patients (including a wide range of different diagnoses, and yet there are known differences in CAM use across diagnostic groups), ‘non-cancer volunteers’ (a disparate mix of visitors and other patients at a single hospital), and health care professionals (it is not clear if these people all work with cancer patients or not).
7. The questionnaire used to assess CAM use appears to be based on a tool that has been developed and validated in a completely different population and
language. The questionnaire repeatedly refers to ‘alternative medicine’ which may be interpreted in very different ways by different people. The questionnaire does not ask people to report their use of alternative medicine within a specific time period or specifically in relation to cancer. Overall, the validity of the questionnaire tool appears questionable.

8. The discussion needs to consider the limitations of this study.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests