Reviewer's report

Title: The prevalence and functional impact of musculoskeletal conditions amongst clients of a primary health care facility in an under-resourced area of Cape Town.

Version: 1 Date: 30 June 2009

Reviewer: chris lavy

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1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes the question is clear

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   The methods are quite well described but we are not told of the actual screening instrument. We know it had some questions taken from the Copcord questionnaire but we could not repeat this study as we don’t know the actual questions. As to whether the methods are appropriate this will be commented on later. The authors take as their base population those attending health centres, so the base pop is already quite skewed and although some comments about this population can be made, it is difficult to compare with the population as a whole.

3. Are the data sound?
   I believe so but have no evidence for this.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   It is not clear whether the patients gave written or just verbal consent.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   I found the results interesting but I had a lot of queries. On p 6 we are told that the majority of the population are between 18 and 34 years of age. This is an interesting fact that is not referenced. On p 8 we are told that the average age of the population under study is 46. I am not sure whether this is just the female pop under study or the total pop under study. Either way it means that the population under study is very different from the background population.

   There were issues with the definition of cases and controls. In table 1 the controls are defined as the 1005 people who were studied, while in table 2 the
control column is the population under study who are not cases ie 643 out of 1005. The authors in one table compare cases with the population and in the other table they compare cases with the population who are not cases.

There is discussion on p 13 of the coloured population suffering from PJP/SJP. This is a very sensitive area. On p 8 we are told that they mean ‘mixed race’ when they say ‘coloured’. This is not always the case and some societies include black people in the term ‘coloured’. I do not wish to dwell on this issue but feel it appropriate to raise.

In the conclusions the authors state that management and rehabilitation of disability have to be addressed at the primary health care centre. I think they are getting a bit carried away here as many of the common MSC need specialized treatment eg joint replacement.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

The Limitations in regard to the population being studied are stated several times. The population being studied is one of people actively seeking health care and cannot be compared to the normal population. However such comparisons are made in several places in the discussion.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Yes.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes the grammar and spelling was OK.

Overall I enjoyed the paper as this is an area of interest for me. It has major limitations as it is a study of a self selected group, but nevertheless I feel it is worth publishing if the above issues are dealt with.