Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Assessment of nerve involvement in the lumbar spine: association between magnetic resonance imaging, physical examination and pain drawing findings

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 19 December 2008

**Reviewer:** Alison Hazel McGregor

**Reviewer’s report:**

Firstly thank you for a fantastic and really stimulating paper, I found this fascinating.

To play devils advocate my question is how do we know that our physical clinical examinations are robust and reliable - that is what if the errors were in the examination and pain diagrams rather than the MRIs. Recently Hanne Albert presented some work questioning the validity and reliability of clinical dermatomes. Although I don't think this work is published it has been presented at National and International Meeting and may well be in press but it would question your conclusions.

So how valid or robust are the pain drawing and the clinical examination?

Others may argue that MRI is performed in lying and no under full loading conditions - you may want to refer to this to defend your arguments by referring to open scanning work as this will make the discussion more complete

Minor points

Page 5 line 5 - what does PE stand for?
Page 5 line 3 - why 123 subjects?
Page 5 last sentence - perhaps the ethical board rather than an ethical board
Page 6 - could you provide a little more detail on how the physical examination was performed and with respect to comment above was this based on dermatomes?
Page 9 - this belief of patient in MRI is really important and interesting - just feel perhaps it needs more emphasis later in the discussion

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**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