Reviewer's report

Title: Prognostic Factors in Sciatica: A Systematic Review

Version: 1 Date: 27 June 2011

Reviewer: Frederieke Schaafsma

Reviewer's report:

Review:
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? yes
3. Are the data sound? yes
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? yes
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? yes
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? yes
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 Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?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

This is a very interesting systematic review to read and may be insightful for a lot of health practitioner dealing with low back pain and sciatica in their daily practice. This review has focused on factors of influence for people suffering from sciatica. Based on only 8 studies it becomes clear that more research is necessary to help understand what factors influence a positive or a negative outcome.

I was surprised that the authors could find only such a limited number of studies that deal with the prognosis of sciatica. I was also a bit surprised that there was only one article that had to be excluded because it dealt with a combination of LBP and sciatica patients. I always thought that for the most part these were combined in the literature.

Discretionary Revisions:

I know that there are experts in the field who make a difference between severe sciatica (with motor mall function or sever nerve root irritation; e.g. paresis of foot lifters) or mild sciatica. When reading the definitions as described in the selected articles there is quite a mixture but no division between severe and mild sciatica. Further, in the literature regarding positive SLR testing there are authors who differ between very positive e.g. after 30 degrees or mildly positive.
1. The authors used a more general definition for sciatica, but I would like to know if they feel that some division in severity may have added value and may differ in terms of prognosis?

2. Although, the authors mention in the results section that there was some difference about the definition of sciatica in the included studies, I did not read a recommendation for future studies that they should all use the same definition. I think this would be a good recommendation?

3. The same issue goes for the different types of outcome measures. This makes it difficult to compare study results. From the literature in low back pain we know that people still suffering from low back pain may already have returned to their usual daily activities and returned to work. There are different factors that may influence these different outcomes. As is mentioned by the authors there is a huge amount of literature partly from occupational health studies. For returning to your work a good relationship with your manager and having the possibility to organize your work yourself is of big influence for a quick return to work. It would be interesting to know if this also goes for people suffering from sciatica.

4. The authors found one study studying the influence of heavy work but could not find an association. This is an interesting finding because in the literature there are studies reporting that heavy work may cause sciatica: Sørensen IG et al. Occupational and other predictors of herniated lumbar disc disease - a 33-year follow-up in The Copenhagen Male Study. 2011 Spine

There is also another interesting article about this issue:


Maybe the authors could elaborate some more on this in their discussion?

5. In the conclusion section authors should change no into not; first sentence.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance 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.