Reviewer’s report

Title: A randomised controlled trial of preventive spinal manipulation with and without a home exercise program for patients with chronic neck pain.

Version: 3 Date: 1 October 2010

Reviewer: Charlotte Leboeuf-Yde

Reviewer’s report:

I have already reviewed this article before and am glad to have seen in come back again. A few things remain (and I am sorry that the order in which they are listed does not necessarily follow the flow of the document):

Minor compulsory revisions

Abstract:

In the abstract, "HRQOL" appears without explanation.

Abstract: Result section should be written so that you report primarily if there was any difference between the three treatment groups AND you should include all the outcome variables that you listed under method. Was there or was there not an effect?

Abstract: Results. Are you not saying the same thing twice about FABQ scores (second sentence) and at the end of sentence number three?

Fig. 2 is very informative but it should run from minimum score to maximum score. For example if you use an eleven unit VAS scale, it should go from 0 to 10. Otherwise even small differences may look considerable. All three variables might have to be redrawn.

On p. 9 you come with a brave statement, telling us about the clinically acceptable level. You have decided on an "arbitrary level". Fair enough, but is there no literature on that subject? What I am concerned about is that I do not find an explanation anywhere of the time limit for when they should note down their pain. Tht day or that week or wht? Please specify.

I do not think that you can say in English that patients were "met" (you write this several times) when you mean that they attended the clinic/consulted. You should ask a native English speaking person. Also, you can dispense pills but it sounds very weird, at least to my ears, that you dispense chiropractic consultations and suchlike.

Patients came back for "treatment". Well the control group did not get a treatment so perhaps rather write "visit", "appointment" or suchlike.

Discretionary revisions
Method, p.7 last sentence in third para: Perhaps add the word "future" in "...blinded to treatment allocation for the FUTURE preventve phase"

When presenting results as mean improvement it would be nice to know what, for example, the maximum possible value is. E.g ´"...the average pain level of participants decreased by 1.2 cm out of 10 on the VAS".

Please supply reference for statement on clinical significance thresholds that have been proposed (top of p.13).

P.13 I do n't understand on whom you report overall compliance ("excluding the patients who dropped out during the randomized phase of the trial". If you exclude these how can you talk about compliance? Perhaps explain more clearly.

Discussion first para. I see you talk about what went well but not what did not work. Your study is about comparing three preventive strategies. Get the wool out of your mouth and say it clearly so that everybody can understand. Is there a difference in outcome when you perform SMT with or without home exercises? Does this strategy seem to work or not?

I trust the authors will make these changes themselves.

Regards
Charlotte Leboeuf-Yde

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.