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: 11 October 2010

Reviewer: Paul Peloso

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
a. on page 13 - clinically acceptable pain
   the authors should define what level of pain was chosen. (acknowledged that this reviewer suggested 3.0)
   the authors should give both n, and percent for the cut point chosen and they should also give the time point or points that this was determined.

b. cointerventions
   - it needs to be clear on page 14 what is represented by the 7.6+/- 1.1 co-interventions compared to the other two groups (4.1+/-0.9 and 2.9+/-0.9).
   What does 7.6 represent ? 7.6 "episodes" of co-intervention ? days of co-intervention use ? doses ? etc.
   - it is stated that it is significantly different. is this statistically significant, in which case a post hoc p-value would be useful, or it is meant that this is clinically important ?
   c. how do the authors know that they applied the "right dose" of SMT over the 10 weeks of study. this should be acknowledged as a limitation, if there is no clear data-driven basis for the selection of the 4 sessions.

Minor essential revisions
a. Table 3.
   - need to add SD to the table. while it is acknowledged that one can use the 95%CL to back calculate the SD, SD is preferred to 95% CI. Also, as authors know well, overlap of 95% CI is not the same thing as differences between groups based on a p-value from ANOVA. No objection to presenting both SD and 95%CI.

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:

Dr Peloso participated in the 2000-2010 Decade of the Bone and Joint Task Force on Neck Pain and Associated Disorders, and spinal manipulation was a consideration of the deliberations of that task force. No other conflicts declared.