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: 4 Date: 26 November 2010

Reviewer: Paul Peloso

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1. For the clinically acceptable pain - under the description of the outcomes - the authors describe clinically acceptable pain as a 2 point difference from baseline value during the preventative phase. It is not clear if this means that the patient changed by 2 points from their entry score into the trial, and this was defined as a "responder". For example, patient starts at 3.5 cm on a 10 cm scale upon entry into the trial. They improve in the open label symptomatic phase, and they go to a pain score of 1.5, and thus have a clinically meaningful response. Is this what the statement means? Please clarify. If so, it would be helpful to give a worked example.

2. Related to that, on page 13 in the description of the Preventive Phase results, it is stated that "a majority of the participants in the control group (etc...), the SMT group (etc...), and the SMT + exercise group (etc...) stayed below a level of clinically acceptable pain during the preventive phase of the trial." What is the definition of clinically acceptable pain here? same as above?

3. What was the beginning score for the calculation of the clinically acceptable pain for the preventive phase? Was it the beginning pain score upon entry into the trial ? ie. before the symptomatic phase of the trial ? or - was the beginning score for the preventive phase used ? i.e. the score at the end of the symptomatic phase treatment ?

4. the control group should really be renamed the "attention-control" group, since that it what it is.

Minor issues:
page 14 - bottom of page
"Our results shown that all 3 groups showed primary and secondary outcomes scores similar to those obtain following the non-randomized ..... " The correct word is "obtained".

page 15 - top 1/3 of page
"In our study, more than 75% of participants have been experiencing ...." Have should be "had" or the sentence could be simplified to:
"In our study, more than 75% of participants experienced ..."
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: