Reviewer's report

Title: Manual therapy followed by specific active exercises versus a placebo followed by specific active exercises on the improvement of functional disability in patients with chronic non specific low back pain: a randomized controlled trial

Version: 3 Date: 27 March 2012

Reviewer: M Cairns

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this interesting article.

It is generally well written and should be of interest to the readers of BMC Musculoskeletal. It presents some interesting preliminary results.

I would recommend: Discretionary Revisions as detailed below.

I have also attached these as a word document.

Background; Para 1
3rd sentence starting “Mainly, risk factors …” could be reworded to improve clarity

5th sentence; might be useful to indicate that other models in addition to that proposed by O’Sullivan are available.

Last sentence; ‘evidences’ should read ‘evidence’

2nd papa: 2nd line: system needs to be included to read central nervous system changes rather than central nervous changes

Last sentence: Reads “Recent studies…”, but only one reference is quoted, should this read “study” instead?

Enhance/increase should read enhanced/decreased

3rd Paragraph: 2nd line: this sentence is not clear and I suggest it is reworded.

Last line: A little more detail here would be useful

Page 6: 1st para: RCTs observed should read RCT reported or demonstrated

Last line: “As well” is somewhat colloquial and is not really needed

2.1 Subjects: Last line: “can maintain their usual medication” does not make sense and I suggest should be re-worded

Page 10: “At the end of the 8 therapeutic sessions, patients were allowed to seek alternative treatments, if needed. They were not recorded at the subsequent re-evaluation sessions.” This latter statement really needs further justification as it could have been a confounding factor if subjects sought lots of additional treatment over and above the study interventions

Statistical analysis: Was either a priori or post hoc power calculation undertaken?
Details of how the loss to follow-up were dealt should be included.

Results: last paragraph “favor” should read “favour”

Discussion (current page 14): Final paragraph, sentence beginning “However, it is not excluded ….” This makes a good point but could be re-worded to improve clarity.

Current page 15: Second paragraph: “This should be confirmed”. An indication of how this should be confirmed i.e. what research is needed, would strengthen this statement.

Current page 15: last sentence “Therefore, they were not optimal to isolate any effect” does not make sense it in current state.

Nest line “…. the number of patients was not important but comparable…..” should be re-worded to improve clarity. The word ‘inconveniences’ is incorrect, either you mean ‘limitations’ or ‘shortcomings’.

Current page 16: Last line regarding possible type II errors is not clear.

The next line “Data available of all patients were integrated into the study analysis” is not clear as there were drop outs.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'