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: 5 Date: 22 June 2012

Reviewer: Mitchell Haas

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript is now very well written with most concerns completely addressed. Several minor tweaks are recommended below, particularly to make the paper’s conclusion and the abstract’s conclusions consistent.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. None.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1. Abstract: Identify the study as a pilot here. The casual reader who does not get past the abstract will otherwise not know this. The more diligent reader will not see this until the conclusion section.
2. Abstract conclusion: The abstract should be more circumspect about long-term pain consistent with the entirely appropriate language in the paper’s conclusion section (lines 359-367). Add language such as “probably” to qualify the long-term effects of pain, because the outcome did not reach statistical significance.
3. Early stopping decision (Lines 116-118): Add language saying that the decision to stop recruitment early was made without knowledge of study findings.

Discretionary Revisions:
1. I agree that differential effects of sham interventions are a standard limitation of randomized trials. However, this will only be obvious to researchers. The concept is rather arcane for most readers and easily forgotten after research 101 in school. Reconsider addressing this under limitations.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.