Reviewer's report

Title: Prognosis of Patients with Whiplash-associated disorders consulting Physiotherapy: Development of a predictive model for recovery

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2012

Reviewer: Howard Vernon

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

The authors have not provided a sufficient and convincing justification for why the findings of this study are relevant only to physical therapists (see below). There is no problem with obtaining data from a single practitioner group and identifying that process in the Methods. However, it is, in my opinion, no justifiable to then limit the implications of the findings to only one practitioner group. Please address the points itemized in Minor Essential Revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the Abstract, line 3, the authors specify "physical therapists" for interest in their study. This is inappropriate. I would suggest a general category such as "spine pain practitioners".

Same for Introduction: "It is important for physical therapists to predict which patients with WAD are more likely to..."

Same for Methods: "medical history improve the ability of physical therapists to predict recovery." (This study is not just for physical therapist to use!)

Same for Discussion: "Information about prognostic factors incorporated in the model is easily gathered in the medical history taken by a physical therapist"

Same for Conclusion: "Our model can guide physical therapists to assess medical history information that are important for predicting recovery".

This sentence is particularly problematic: "Patients with WAD frequently seek physical therapists and this model may be an important tool to help physical therapists in their management of these patients."

What does the fact that these subjects consulted a PT have to do with the model other than the selection bias imposed by the authors?

These changes are further justified because:

a. it is reported that all subjects in used in this study also consulted an MD.

and,

b. the authors indicate that "We used the data collected in the baseline questionnaire as a proxy for medical history collected by a physical
therapist. It is possible that patients would answer differently when consulting a physical therapist." Therefore, the data was not obtained through any direct interaction with a PT anyway!

If the authors do not agree with this logic, then they should provide a justification in the Introduction and then in the Discussion as to why it is important to report this model as only useful for PT's.

Introduction:

2. Based on the authors' own text: "Although the prognosis of WAD is favourable, previous studies have found as much as 50% of the affected individuals to be symptomatic one year after the injury.[5, 9]", I would suggest amending this to "generally favourable" (in the Abstract as well).

Methods:

3. It is a little confusing to read about the large population cohort for SGI which the authors describe as "we created", and then read "included in our study cohort were patients...who consulted a PT..."

It seems to me that you want to indicate that the study sample was selected from a previously formed (and reported on) cohort for the SGI. Then, specific inclusion criteria for that selection should be listed.

4. In Data Collection, please correct the word "rational" to "rationale".

Discretionary Revisions:

None

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:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'