Reviewer’s report

Title: National audit of post-operative management in spinal surgery

Version: 1 Date: 11 January 2006

Reviewer: Charles Greenough

Reviewer’s report:

General
Manuscript Review National Audit of Post-Operative Management In Spinal Surgery

The authors have undertaken a survey of the post operative management of lumbar spinal surgery. There are a number of interesting results, particularly the inconsistency of individual surgeon’s advice regarding different activities.

Overall, I think the paper contains some interesting material but unless the different types of surgery can be separately described it is difficult to draw many valid conclusions from the data.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The major difficulty with this study is the heterogeneous nature of the surgeries studied. The authors make no distinction between fusion surgery, discectomy and decompression. Although it is stated that the surgeons did not state that their practice varied on the surgical procedure performed, it is not clear whether this was a question specifically asked or whether surgeons were asked to describe their post operative regime for each type of operation.

There are good surgical reasons why a fusion might be treated differently to decompression or discectomy in that surgeons may prefer to wait until some evidence of bone healing has occurred. There also may be the differences between discectomy and decompression, for example the population undergoing discectomy is likely to be significantly younger than the population undergoing decompression.

Unfortunately I believe this aspect may have a significant confounding effect on the results presented.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

There are a number of areas where the paper is confusing.

On Page 3 it would be helpful if the settings in which the surgeons worked were made exclusive as these add to more than 100 percent.

Page 4, paragraph 3, the use of corsets is questionably related to fusion without instrumentation.
Either the data supported this or it didn’t.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests