Reviewer's report

Title: The course of pain drawings during a 10-week treatment period in patients with acute and sub-acute low back pain

Version: Date: 1 June 2006

Reviewer: Janet Freburger

Reviewer's report:

General
I appreciate the authors attempts to address the concerns raised in my first review. Unfortunately, I still had trouble understanding and following the manuscript. I found myself re-reading sections often and still trying to make sense of the data analysis. Some new questions were raised as I read the manuscript this time. A lack of organization/consistency from one section to the next in regard to objectives, measures, analyses, and results also became more apparent to me. I have provided some comments below. Thank you for the opportunity to review your work. Unfortunately, I do not have time to review it again.

Background
The rationale for the study is still unclear to me. One issue appears to be that no one has examined the association between pain modalities and pain or function and this is important because pain modalities can be ranked and/or graded/prioritized. I do not follow what the authors mean by ranking or grading/prioritizing.

Design/Sampling
It is still unclear to me how only 316 patients were referred from a recruitment sample of 19,000 and a 5 year study period. The authors did not answer this question for me.

Treatment
How often were patients treated? What were the treatment modalities? What was the full reference treatment? How many subjects in each group? Though not the focus of the study, what is provided is too cryptic.

Data Collection
Section is clearer, but still hard to follow. It would probably make sense to have a separate section on measurements and then discuss data collection.

Data analyses
I do not understand your regression surface (Figure 3). Also in a multivariate logistic regression analysis, the dependent variables should be categorical, so I don’t follow.

How do 436 pain drawings relate to the number of subjects? How many subjects?

If I’m following correctly, you lumped repeated measures on the same subject (0, 5, 10 wks) into one regression analysis. Did you account for the non-independence of the measures?

Results
Radiation of pain into the lower extremities appears to be an important issue but not a concept that is well developed prior to the Results section. Also, the only information presented on dominating pain modality focuses on the lower back and buttocks area. How did you reduce dominating pain in two areas into a single measure for Figure 2. Why not report on dominating pain in other areas since this seems to be a focus in your introduction (i.e., pain modalities). As noted earlier, I do not follow Figure 3 and do not understand why you broke the data into radiation and no radiation.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests