Reviewer's report

Title: Subjective and objective outcome in congenital talipes equinovarus; a comparative study of 204 children.

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2007
Reviewer: Matthew B Dobbs

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General
The authors present a study comparing selected objective measures and a new subjective questionnaire for the evaluation of patients treated with clubfoot deformity. This is a clinically relevant topic as clubfoot is the most common inherited musculoskeletal birth defect. In addition, it is relevant because there is yet to be consistent and standardized ways to evaluate clubfoot treatment outcomes. I applaud the authors in their efforts of investigating this area further.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. change congenital talipes equinovarus to clubfoot in title.
2. Abstract: 1st line CTEV is used without defining it first. A suggestion for the entire manuscript is to use clubfoot. The authors can use congenital talipes equinovarus (clubfoot) initially and then refer to clubfoot throughout text.
3. Abstract: methods: list statistical methods
4. Background: 1st paragraph: the authors allude to the fact that an objective assessment looking at ankle motion and position would be good but those are not the objective measurements the authors use in the methods.
5. Background, 2nd paragraph: The writing could be improved by “……., calf circumference, gait, skinfold thickness, foot length, foot width, and shoe size.”
6. Background, 3rd paragraph: Shouldn’t have one sentence for a paragraph. The authors state some have advocated the use of radiographs in evaluation of clubfeet. Certainly, many others don’t advocate it including the long-term follow-up out of the University of Iowa that found no correlation with radiographic outcome and clinical result.
7. Patients and Methods: This section should be strengthened. There is no demographic information about the patient population. What is the age of the patients at follow-up? How were the clubfoot treated—surgically or with the Ponseti method, french method, etc? Age at diagnosis? Age at treatment? Number of surgeries? Number of complications? All of these factors can correlate with outcome as well.
8. Patients and Methods: 3rd paragraph is only one sentence and should be included in paragraph 2. In the current paragraph the authors write “15” and “three”. Need to follow journal format on reporting numbers.
9. Patients and Methods: Authors current 4th paragraph: The authors need to justify why they chose the objective measures they did instead of strength, range of motion, etc.
10. Patients and Methods: current 4th paragraph: The entire sentence starting with ‘Ideally…. “ can be deleted.
11. Patients and Methods: The paragraph starting with “Twelve…..” Should be part of the preceding paragraph.
12. Patients and Methods: The last paragraph should be separated and entitle statistical analysis. This needs to be more detailed as well and the authors need to note what p-value they considered significant for each test.
13. Results: We need to know who is answering the questionnaires. This comes back to my question as to what is the age of the patients?
14. Results: Is there any information on the 46 families that are not included in the study. How were they doing at last follow-up? How many surgeries had they had? It would be important to know this cohort of patients is similar to those that responded.
15. Results: Objective assessment: 2nd paragraph, last sentence starting with, “Obviously…..”. This sentence can be omitted. If it is obvious, don’t say it.
16. Results: The authors refer to muscle wasting as being synonymous with decreased calf circumference. This is not necessarily true. Patients with clubfoot treated without surgery have been shown to have symmetric strength to the unaffected leg but still have smaller calf. This needs to be addressed throughout
the text.
17. Discussion: 2nd paragraph should be combined with 1st paragraph.
18. Discussion: current 2nd paragraph: can be improved: ……ankle and foot, gait analysis,……sole of the foot, calf circumference, skinfold thickness, foot length, foot width, and shoe size.
19. Discussion: 3rd paragraph: “and there remains the risk of iatrogenic…….patient.” This can be omitted.
20. Discussion: Paragraph that is one sentence: “In the present study…..” The authors should develop this paragraph.
21. Discussion: Does sex affect outcome? 1st sentence: “a greater proportion…” This should be in result section.

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

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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: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.