Reviewer's report

Title: A Proposed Diagnosis-Based Clinical Decision Rule for the Non-Surgical Management of Patients with Spinal Pain

Version: 5 Date: 18 June 2007

Reviewer: Ronald Donelson

Reviewer's report:

General

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

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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)

There were several typos along the way that I unfortunately didn't note.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I believe this paper is substantially improved over the original submission and will be a worthwhile contribution to the low back pain literature.

The authors and I agree in emphasizing the great amount of research that lies ahead to investigate their model, as well as their own and others' clinical experiences. They have wisely, I feel, withdrawn statements about their own clinical experience. We are nevertheless all unavoidably influenced by that experience and that of others we respect.

It was in that context that I passed on my prior comments, intended to provide the clinical experience of large numbers of MDT-trained clinicians worldwide whose collective evaluations of spinal pain patients are substantial, reported as reliable, and many feel validated in the large subset of centralizers. While validation data in the many smaller LBP subgroups is admittedly still forthcoming, I had nevertheless hoped to assist the authors in formulating and perhaps improving their model's accuracy as future data unfolds.

Unfortunately, I was insufficiently clear in my communication since the authors' construed my efforts as pushing the McKenzie methods in areas where there is no published validation evidence as yet to support this strong clinical experience. However, given the clear precedent from the centralization data that the findings of this particular subset of clinicians are both reliable and validated, I mistakenly felt the authors might find some value in this information while still formulating their thought process model to be tested with future studies.

I am happy with the paper as it currently reads and I thank the authors for engaging (putting up with?) me in this review process. I look forward to further discussions as these gentlemen pursue a very important line of research.

Ron Donelson, MD, MS
June 18, 2007

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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.