Reviewer's report

Title: Subacute and chronic, non-specific back and neck pain: cognitive-behavioural rehabilitation versus primary care. A randomized controlled trial.

Version: 2 Date: 7 July 2008

Reviewer: Ivan Steenstra

Reviewer's report:

I will try to review this paper as if it was a new manuscript since it has changed considerably (it improved considerably).

However, I still have some questions and remarks.

I will start from the beginning of the manuscript.

Overall it seems that the manuscript could be cleaned up by following the CONSORT statement: http://www.consort-statement.org/index.aspx?o=1030

The first 8 pages seem OK to me< i am not sure whether behaviourist is an actual English word, but maybe a native English speaker could comment on that?

P.8 Outcome measures.

I actually think you only have one return to work outcome: any degree of work ability for at least 30 days in succession over 18 months. Share and chance is just another way of analyzing the outcome and this belong under analyses and statistics. It could be argued that this is the best definition of RTW outcome.

Anema et al, Staal et al and Heymans et al have all used 100% of work ability and it might be useful to use an outcome similar on this aspect to enable international comparison (Cochrane would be pleased about that).

P. 8 line 186 are you sure that (30) is the correct reference?

p.9 Analyses and statistics

Maybe a statistician should take a look at this paragraph. I am not completely ignorant in statistics, but I always get confused when interaction terms are introduced that are not used to look for modifying effects but for main effects.

On p.10 line 225: per protocol analysis: what was the rational for doing so? Or was it just a data mining expedition?

P.10. Blinding: line 228 analyser=analyst?

P. 11. Power calculation has been done very nicely. The power is driven by the outcome and the method of analysis used. I am guessing that you actually have
sufficient power for the Cox regression analysis.

P. 11 Inclusion procedure: where is the informed consent form and when and where was it signed? Maybe the ethics approval paragraph should be place closer to this one (CONSORT?)?

p. 12 L. 268 is this a result or part of the intervention, I don't think it's part of the inclusion procedure.

Line 279 Paragraph Premature cessation should precede, paragraph on follow up.

P. 13 Line 297 first sentence is a strange sentence to start with, could probably be underneath Table 2.

p. 18 line 413, this explanation is from Steenstra et al, paper on GA.
line 417 six months follow? again Steenstra et al, the Anema et al paper is 12 months follow up same for Heymans as far as I know (he has been collecting data for 12 months as far as I can tell :-).

L 424 What do you exactly mean by extent?
Line 433, which book? Lasting return to work!!! Which was defined as 100% RTW for at least 30 days, what did you do? Any RTW?

Line 437 No upper time limit: where there any limits set beyond 6 months? That looks like irrational recovery expectations.

Line 438: Were MT and cortisone injection delivered within you experimental intervention? If so, how can you reassure that nothing is wrong while at the same time you "readjust" and treat "inflammation"? If not please state this.

I think the table could use some work. Maybe you could mention which methods of analysis you used with every table of results?

Table 5. a hazard ratio is never for one group it's a ratio: Rehab compared with usual care for instance.

Figure 1 worries me a bit the first box states 149 assessed, which patients were actually considered for the study?

In general throughout the manuscript you seem to mix up Primary Care and Health center group.

I do not understand figure 4 & 5, shouldn't this be one figure?

I think it's an interesting study, are you going to perform a cost-effectiveness analysis? Maybe you should discuss this in the manuscript.
Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

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