Reviewer's report

Title: Practice patterns of doctors of chiropractic with a pediatric diplomate: a cross-sectional survey

Version: 1 Date: 12 April 2010

Reviewer: Lise Hestbaek

Reviewer's report:

This seems to be a very well executed study with sound methods and analyses. The method and the result sections are very well written and easy to read. I have some problems with the discussion and conclusion as described below. However, this only requires some restructuring of the discussion and I think it will be suitable for publication.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Yes
3. Are the data sound? Yes
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? No
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Partly
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? No
9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes

Major compulsory revisions:

1. Analysis of non-responders. Although the authors consider a response rate of 62% satisfactory, the sample may not be representative. I realize that it is not possible to compare the final sample with the target sample on all parameters, but it should be done where it is possible, e.g. one of the conclusions of the study is that the majority is female – this could be calculated for the whole sample from the names. I don’t know if the authors have access to other information, such as practice characteristics and additional degrees for the target sample, but an attempt should be made to document representativeness.

2. When your abstract conclusion concentrates on similarities and differences between DCs with a pediatric diplomate degree and other surveys of typical chiropractors, I would like a more stringent comparison between the results from this study and other studies in the discussion. Otherwise your conclusion is not supported by your manuscript. Take each result and compare it to previous surveys, where possible. Examples:
a. 4th paragraph: Although this differs from the typical doctor of chiropractic it is similar to……. Give us the male:female ration for the typical DC and a reference.

b. 5th paragraph: I don’t see the relevance to this study.

c. 6th paragraph: “….higher referral….. lower referral pattern…..” How much higher or lower? Is it relevant, significant or just borderline, that could be a coincidence?

d. In the conclusion you write:….they are more likely than other chiropractors to treat young patients……” That is probably correct – we would have guessed that without doing a study. The study provides information about the age distribution of the patients in the study, but I don’t find comparative figures for other chiropractors.

Minor compulsory revisions:
1. Under “Strengths and limitations of the study”, 1st paragraph, last sentence: I don’t think you can conclude from using different sampling strategies that you have a representative sample.
2. Same section, 2nd paragraph, last sentence: I don’t understand this sentence. How does honesty relate to sampling strategy?
3. Please label the tables that are presently included as supplementary material. After printing, there is no indication of what the table represents. Maybe include it in the manuscript?

Discretionary revisions:
1. Background, 5th paragraph, 2nd sentence: “Of the various programs offered…….” I don’t see the relevance of this information in relation to the present study.
2. Results, Treatment procedures, Chiropractic techniques: Is it true that both the proportion using cranial therapy and extremity manipulation are 77%, or is it a mistake that it is the same figure?
3. Results, Treatment procedures, Additional therapies: It is easier to read if you follow the same pattern of recording. In the first paragraph you start with therapies provided once per month followed by therapies provided every other week. In the next paragraph it is the other way around.
4. There seems to be a large difference in the volume of the two pediatric programs described in the discussion. It would be interesting to see, if there are differences in practice patterns between the two groups.

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

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