Reviewer's report

Title: What Rheumatologists in the United States Think of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Results of a National Survey

Version: 1 Date: 14 August 2009

Reviewer: Stefanie Joos

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript describes the results of a national survey assessing the perceptions of rheumatologists about CAM and their willingness to recommend specific CAM therapies.

The survey is part of a larger national survey of health care providers’ perceptions about CAM.

However, the research question (of the sub-analysis presented in the paper) is not defined clearly enough. Moreover, there are some methodological details which remain unclear to the reader.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Overall:

• On p 7 the authors state that “…the survey focus on the rheumatologists´ opinion and use of CAM specifically for osteoarthritis”. This is an important information which should be included in the abstract, survey and possibly as well in the title. Furthermore, the introduction and the discussion section should focus more on osteoarthritis. Moreover, glucosamine /chondroitin is a CAM therapy nearly specific for osteoarthritis whereas the other therapies are covering multiple diseases-this makes a comparison difficult.

Introduction / Methods

• A brief introduction to the international perspective / research would be good.

• In the U.S. as well as in other countries patients with rheumatologic diseases are treated by primary care physicians (PCP), in particular patients with osteoarthritis. This is an important information and, therefore, information about the “reality of care” in this connection should be included in the introduction.

• On p 7 they state that osteoarthritis is the most common diagnosis in general rheumatology practices. This should be underlined by numbers and by literature.

• The authors bring forward the argument, that the survey of Berman et al included questions about dietary perceptions, exercise and behavioural medicine which belong to conventional medicine and do not strictly constitute CAM resp. I can not follow these arguments. Dietary and exercise are parts of naturopathy (see http://nccam.nih.gov/health/naturopathy/) So, the arguments for the selection of the CAM therapies for their survey is not convincing at all. Moreover,
they body work s item in their survey. However, body work includes massage (manuscript p 9), but also massage has a huge overlap with conventional medicine http://nccam.nih.gov/health/massage/

- Data management/analysis: the statistical analysis is not clear enough. Why univariate and multivariate analyses? Too many tables and numbers, e.g. table 3 could be omitted and the relevant data could be described in the text passage and/or it could be given as a diagram.

Results:
- The presentation of the results is unfavourable. Table 2 should be arranged more clearly (maybe as a diagram) so that the reader can identify the most important results on the first view.
- Some subgroups are too small to draw a conclusion (e.g. institutional practice). In table 3 and 4 the analyses of the practice setting could be omitted since the subgroups are too small and there are no significant differences (there could be included one sentence in the text).

Discussion:
- Too long, more focus on the key results
- It would be interesting to compare the findings of Berman in 2000 with their findings.
- Again, the international perspective would be good.
- On p 15 the authors state the representative sampling as a strength of the study. However, there is no information given about the numbers of rheumatologists in the whole U.S., about the percentages of women etc.
- On p 15 they write that “This provides a comprehensive view of specialist attitudes, whereas all previous surveys have focused on primary care providers”. However, in my opinion the view would be comprehensive when specialists and PCP would have been surveyed (…because these doctors share the treatment of OA patients).
- Moreover, it would be interesting to compare the perspectives of rheumatologists and PCP in the discussion section

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

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