Reviewer's report

Title: Use of complementary and alternative medicine by those with a chronic disease and the general population - results of a national population based survey

Version: 1 Date: 7 July 2010

Reviewer: Michael Goldstein

Reviewer's report:

This is a very straightforward account that employs a very large and valuable data set. Having said that it is unclear to me what this particular article adds to our knowledge about the use of complementary and alternative medicine. At best, the contribution is minimal.

First... the lit review: It is very brief and basic. One problem is that it is unclear if the pieces cited are meant to refer to Canada or to the broader scene in the US and other developed nations as well. The statement that "little attention has been paid to how CAM use differs by type of disease" (or words to that effect) is flat out wrong. There are literally hundreds of articles addressing this point, beginning with Eisenberg's classic pieces decades ago.

It is also not really clear why the 4 specific conditions used here were selected. The stated reason (that they exist over the lifecourse) could apply to hundreds of other conditions as well. It would have been much better to select conditions that might be related to the types of practitioners the study asked about. For example, if you are examining the use of chiropractors, then ask about muskuloskeletal conditions, etc. In addition a high proportion of CAM use is in the form of self care which is left out of this study. That should be mentioned somewhere.

The discussion deals with all sorts of things that are not really in the data. For example, the refusal of many CAM users to reveal their use to their MDs. But the major problem is one the authors themselves see: There is no link in the data between the health problems they are looking at and the use of providers. So what if I have migraines. Perhaps I saw a chiropractor for low back pain, etc.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.