Reviewer's report

Title: Differences in the quality of interpersonal care in complementary and conventional medicine

Version: 3 Date: 28 July 2010

Reviewer: Richard Nahin

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Major Compulsory Revisions

I apologize to the authors and editors, but I noticed an additional concern in this revision that I did not notice in the original. Specifically, the authors provided convincing evidence that the patient populations for the three physician groups vary considerably, especially for disease severity. Given this, these underlying characteristics might possible account for much of the differences seen in patient reported outcomes. In fact, the authors note this in the Discussion where they say “that CAM patients experience poorer relief of symptoms is likely associated with the higher proportion of patients with chronic and apparently more severe disease conditions.” The authors should test this directly by including baseline disease status in their model. Even better would be development and use of propensity scores (Rubin DB. Estimating causal effects from large data sets using propensity scores. Ann Intern Med. 1997 Oct 15;127(8 Pt 2):757-63.)

I still don’t understand the use of the SF-36 scores collected at follow-up to characterize patients attributes at baseline. For some of the diseases being studied, the disease severity waxes and wanes over time. You would then expect changes in the SF-36 scores over time. Thus, the fact that physical functions scores are different among groups at follow-up might tell you nothing about them at baseline.

I still have great concern about the use of only two covariates in the regression models. Based on the CAM literature, these two variables, age and gender, would account for only a small portion of the variance in these models. As stated above, at a minimum the authors need to consider baseline disease status. Based on the literature, I would also include education.

Level of interest: An article of importance 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.