Reviewer's report

Title: The use of economic evaluation in CAM: an introductory framework.

Version: 1 Date: 23 June 2010

Reviewer: Andre Busato

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The article provides a comprehensive overview of economic evaluations that may be useful for health care decision making.

Although easy to read there are some deficits with the article.

CAM has not only the potential to save cost but there is also the possibility that CAM adding to overall cost of care as every new procedure that is included into a health system is not only increasing cost per se but may also result in additive utilization of resources as procedures of current practice are usually not removed from the system. Although not a CAM specific problem, this issue may be relevant in health care decision making.

The description of economic evaluation does not provide fundamentally new insight into how outputs of health interventions are matched with the consumed resources in the setting of CAM. Context related effects inherent to CAM are usually not part of standard economic evaluations and particularly the lack of data of such complex and usually not directly tangible effects can complicate or even make a comprehensive economic evaluation of CAM procedures impossible. The article only inadequately provides guidance on how handle these aspects.

Another problem of the paper relates to the fact that QUALY's may not be as suitable for economic evaluation of CAM as for conventional procedures. Known problems of QUALY's related to the discrimination of patients with chronic conditions and to the negligence of social values and ethical beliefs question the value of QUALY's in the context of a health economic evaluation for CAM. The article should provide a more in depth discussion on this issue.

In conclusion, there is a too strong focus on standard economic procedures that are, with any doubt, important. However, by uncritically applying these methods for CAM it may be very likely, that desired proof of cost effectiveness cannot always be provided.

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'