Reviewer's report

Title: The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Among Finnish Parents - a population survey

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2011

Reviewer: Yuri Clement

Reviewer's report:

Overview:
This survey interviewed 4032 parents of children under 12 years of age using a questionnaire to determine parental use of CAMs over the previous two days. It was shown that 31% of parents used CAMs which included vitamins, minerals, fish oils and fatty acids.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:
General comments:
The study had the potential to deliver novel findings, but generally no new information was presented. A major deficit of the present study was the very narrow time window for recall of CAM use. This severe limitation would have certainly skewed the data towards CAMs used only for daily health maintenance and this probably explains the high prevalence of use of vitamins and minerals. This narrow time window would have excluded parents’ patterns of CAM use over time and that information would not have been captured, with subsequent incorrect conclusions. We would expect that CAM use would be sporadic and mostly for self-limiting conditions, but this would not have been captured because of the recall limits.

Most parents in this study were relatively young (30 – 45 years old) and we could assume that the majority would not have had serious medical conditions which would warrant chronic use of either conventional medicines or CAMs. The age range in this study limits also restricted the use of other CAMs (besides vitamins and minerals).

Secondly, a novel idea of the survey would have been to determine how parental perception and use of CAM affect administration of CAM to their children? Although it was mentioned that question(s) were asked about children’s use, these results were not presented. This probably would have been the most valuable piece of information coming out of the research. The question: Do children of CAM users also use CAM? remains unanswered.

Background:
There is an overuse of the literature for prevalence of CAM use. The aim of the study stops short and does not explore how parental use affect use (parentally controlled) in their children.
Methods:
What was the rationale for excluding CAM treatments in this study? The questionnaire included questions on the child’s use of CAMs and medicine, but there are no results presented to show this very critical information. Why was the use of CAM only recorded for the previous 2 days?

Results:
With only 5% of respondents being fathers, could statistically valid comparisons be made between females and males in this study? The authors state that 1818 different CAM products were identified in the survey. Is this correct?

Discussion:
This section is particularly weak with repetition of parts of the Background section; only four new references (36-39) were cited.

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

**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'