Reviewer's report

Title: Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use among Breast Cancer Survivors: The Black Women's Health Study

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Reviewer: Gertraud Maskarinec

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript presents information on the use of herbals and vitamins by breast cancer survivors in a cohort of African American women. The paper is well written and the data are clearly presented. However, the nature of the data collected limits the authors' ability to perform novel analyses and to reach very original conclusions. The most serious problem is that it is not known whether the women chose to use herbals or vitamins to help with the breast cancer or to ameliorate other health conditions. It seems likely that for survivors who were diagnosed more than 4 years before answering the questionnaire, other health concerns are more important. One way to address this problem would be to compare herbal use between breast cancer survivors and the other cohort members who do not have breast cancer.

Major Essential Revisions

Here are some points addressing specific issues:

1. The title is not quite appropriate; since only data on herbals and vitamins were collected, the paper does not present comprehensive information on Complementary and Alternative Medicine use. Throughout the paper, caution is advised to make it clear that data on other modalities of CAM were not available.

2. The conclusions in the abstract state that the reasons for CAM use are unclear. Since the authors did not ask about reasons for CAM use, this conclusion is not warranted. It would be preferable to state the most important finding based on the data presented here. The conclusions at the end of the paper could also be less general.

3. In the introduction, the authors state that there is limited literature on African Americans. Is there any reason to think that their CAM use differs from that of other ethnic groups?

4. The section on independent variables is rather long and could be shortened.

5. Given the cross-sectional study design, the odds ratio should be called prevalence odds ratio.

6. To make the results any more interesting, is anything known about the year of diagnosis and/or the stage of disease? Herbal use may be different in women who were recently diagnosed as compared to those who were diagnosed a long time ago. What is the longest time difference between breast cancer diagnosis and the questionnaire in 1999? As mentioned above, the other way to look for
additional findings, herbal use could be compared between breast cancer survivors and women without cancer.

Minor essential revisions
A minor point, but there is something wrong about the reference style; the brackets should probably be placed before the periods.

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