Reviewer’s report

Title: The influence of a series of five dry cupping treatments on pain and mechanical thresholds in patients with chronic non-specific neck pain - a randomised controlled pilot study

Version: 1 Date: 22 March 2011

Reviewer: Gillian Johnson

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

The manuscript requires major editorial work and corrections throughout. There is mismatch between information contained in the Methods and Results section and the Results section and the Tables and most of the major revision requirements comments focus on these two sections.

Methods

The experimental design in this randomized trial is flawed by admitting subjects into the trial who were also undergoing steroidal pain medication and or physiotherapy for four weeks before and during the course of the study thereby confounding the effect of cupping. Therefore any findings are in combination with conventional treatments.

In the methods section the inclusion and exclusion criteria are appropriate and mostly well described. However it is not clear as what is meant by ‘permanent neck pain’. Do the authors mean persistent, consistent, chronic or non-specific neck pain??

Reference is made to different forms of the SF-36 used to measure outcomes including the ‘short form’, ‘standard form’ and the ‘acute form’-this is confusing to the reader and it needs to be clarified as to why use of the standard and acute SF-36 questionnaires leads to greater sensitivity.

It is not clear as to why correlation coefficients analysis reported in the Results section was carried out as details were was not described in the Methods section. Nor was there any mention of the general health outcome assessment using the Likert Scale referred to the Results.

It is not clear if there was any correspondence between the location of the painful myofascial trigger points determined by the physician for the cupping and the painful areas (Pain-Maximum) as ascertained by the patients on the pain diagram.

Results

The authors have not adhered to the appropriate standards for reporting of the results. In the results section P11 there is an error in the reporting of clinical pain
-22.5mm (95% CI -31.9 to 13.1). This should be according to the Table 2
Average clinical pain at rest -22.5mm (95% CI -31.9 to-13.1mm).
The results of an outcome measure of general health before and after treatment
was not described in the methods section (as mentioned above).
There are no reference to the detailed information contained in Tables in the
Results section for either pain measures or the questionnaires.

Minor Essential Revisions
Page 3: Page 1 line 5, Para 2 line 1 non specific hypen needed
Page 3: Para 3 line 6 Trapezius should be trapezius
Spacing for paragraphs needed – after para 2 line 9
Para 2 line 2 patient education not patients’education
Need to clarify as to what is meant by low expectation of conservative treatment
The statement of permanent neck pain for at least 3 months needs to be clarified
Page 5
The statement ‘All patients had been in therapy before, either to an orthopaedic
or to a neurologist’ needs rewording
Page 5 Full text description for the abbreviation ‘NRS’ is required
Page 6 The statement ‘Three resp. four days after the last treatment’ needs
clarifying
Page 8 Not clear as to what the QST protocol refers to
Please check all references - Errors in the reference list
Reference 36

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

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests