Reviewer’s report

Title: Meaning and Challenges in the Practice of Multiple Therapeutic Massage Modalities: A Combined Methods Study

Version: 1 Date: 30 June 2011

Reviewer: Maria Hondras

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript is well-written and an important contribution to the therapeutic massage and bodywork literature in general and research efforts in this arena in particular. The authors built upon preliminary work to design this combined methods study. I have several discretionary revisions for the authors to consider.

- Discretionary Revisions

1. Background, last paragraph
You might insert ‘from Alberta’ in this sentence: “Therefore the purpose of this study was to: (1) document the scope of training and practice of manual therapy providers from Alberta and (2) assess…”

2. Data Collection, Interviews, para. 1: “283 practitioners volunteered for interviews”
Data Collection, Interviews, para. 3: “interviewing continued until data saturation was reached”
Results, Interviews, para. 1: “The 19 interviewees…”

There was a disconnect for me when reading these passages. Were remaining ‘volunteers’ (n=264) notified that they would not be scheduled for interview? If so, consider providing this information – perhaps at the end of Methods, Interviews, para. 3 or at the beginning of Results, Interviews, para. 1. Alternatively, consider reporting the instruction (about whether or not they would be invited for an interview) that was provided to practitioners when completing and submitting the volunteer contact form (as sentence 2 after Data Collection, Interviews, sentence 1?).

3. Results, Interviews, Theme 1, para. 3.
The phrase, “…i.e., medically focused or not…” is unclear to me. Does this relate to western medicine diagnoses that inform the training programs? Will this be clear to other readers?

4. Results, Interviews, Theme 4, para. 2.
This sentence is awkward for me: “There would be doubt with a research protocol or using a single approach to a symptom whether the treatment process was matched to what was occurring in the body.” Consider revising; perhaps two
sentences?

5. Discussion, Study limitations: “(1) the issues described in the results section,”
Consider briefly re-stating ‘the issues’ in the Study Limitations section of the manuscript.

- Minor Issues Not for Publication

a. Abstract, first sentence.
This comment may not be trivial, but I prefer that it not be published with open access. Will the language “non-standardized programs” be offensive to TMB practitioners who prepare, teach and/or participate in these programs? Consider revising the first sentence of the Abstract to read: “…are predominantly trained in variable combinations of therapies and in programs that are not uniformly standardized.” I believe (and hope!) this Abstract will be widely read and do not believe the authors want to offend anyone with the introductory statement!

b. Results, Training Programs, para. 1, sentence 4.
Change “is” to “in” to read: “…providing rudimentary training in some of the therapies’ techniques;…”

c. Table 1, Item 16.
Insert the word “to” to read: “…like me to know before we wrap up.”

d. List of Abbreviations, CAM.
I do not believe the CAM acronym was used in the manuscript. If not, you can remove from the List of Abbreviations.

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.