Reviewer's report

**Title:** The BraveNet Prospective Observational Study on Integrative Medicine Treatment Approaches for Pain

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 7 November 2012

**Reviewer:** George Lewith

**Reviewer's report:**

Major revisions:

1. I think the major achievement of this particular network is that a number of hospitals were able to work together to deliver important information about what was happening to the patients they were seeing with pain. Setting up a network like this and delivering outcome audits is I think a major achievement that the authors potentially have failed to recognise.

2. There are a number of major issues with this report which I think have been misrepresented and need to be addressed. For instance, the suggestion that integrative medicine is something that should be effectively "decided on an individual basis by the centre" means that we don't realistically have any idea of what we're assessing and what the interventions involved. It's clear that many involved conventional painkillers but I would imagine that a lot involved a traditional Chinese medicine approach potentially with acupuncture and herbs. Clearly many centres provided supplements but again some kind of frequency distribution of what was provided where would give us the potential to have some correlation with the broad range of therapeutic interventions (and their eclectic mixes) which might in themselves lead to a successful outcome. It may for instance be that approach based on diminishing regular conventional medicine and increasing acupuncture, exercise and supplements, was consistently associated across all 9 centres with improved outcome.

3. There is no attempt to look for clear markers of who might successfully respond to these interventions (age, sex, duration of pain, severity of pain, educational levels, etc) and are not analysed to develop a model of who might do well from these as yet very poorly defined integrative approaches.

4. The article serves simply to collect data and report the obvious limitations but fails really to consider what could be done with this data with some multivariate statistical analysis. The analysis between responders and non-responders is unconvincing.

Minor revisions:

There are all sorts of minor issues within this paper, for instance the abstract of the results section does not report numbers entered and numbers completed. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are very rarely provided. A justification for the outcome measures (particularly for instance Vitamin D) is not clear. The authors need to justify why they did what and report this in a much more
standard and organised way.

In summary I think this is a very valuable network and the fact that it's achieved data collection across a broad range of centres is superb. It needs to define that as a major achievement and consider very carefully its methodology going forward in relation to how it looks at, evaluates, analyses and considers the data.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.