Reviewer's report

Title: Economic analysis of complementary, alternative, and integrative medicine: recommendations from an expert panel

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Reviewer: helen weatherly

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- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
I think this could be stated more clearly so that the reader has a stronger idea about who the intended audience is e.g. researchers, payers, and/or CAIM practitioners? By way of background, I think the authors could also link the use of economic evaluation to reimbursement. In addition they could describe why CAIM evaluation may present challenges for standard economic evaluation methods – if this is indeed the case. What is distinctive about CAIM? How might this impact on the methods used for economic evaluation of CAIM?

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods section is short and lacks some detail. For example, the authors could note what the list of existing studies that were included in the background paper were, how they were selected(e.g. how it was determined whether they were high quality, more detail on how the panel experts were selected, their training background/skills and their interest in CAIM.

There is some repetition e.g. I think that the first sentence of paragraph 1 of the methods section, P4 could be combined with the first sentence of paragraph 3 of the methods section.

3. Are the data sound? PLEASE NOTE THAT I INCLUDE MY APPRAISAL OF THE RESULTS SECTION HERE

P6 given that the authors needed to describe different types of economic evaluation it seems to me that they may also need to have described what is meant by QALYs and health-related quality of life years, including valuation issues. It seems to me that the background on economic evaluations would sit better in the methods section as these do not contain results.

The authors say on P7 that measuring a specific clinical outcome is relatively straightforward. It would be helpful if they could expand on this.

P8 The authors state that the panel recommended that ... an economic evaluation should document all available costs to allow for analyses appropriate for more than one audience. Did the panel consider that to undertake costing all relevant resource use should be identified, measured, valued and reported as well as unit costs, the sources of the unit costs and the costs themselves? It is
perhaps a matter for the discussion as to what costs it is possible to include? This could be interpreted in a number of different ways. For example, just as the research funds for CAIM is limited, the funds for undertaking the analyses tend to be limited and the wider the remit for costing, the higher the analytic cost of undertaking the research. The perspective of an analysis typically reflects the perspective of the study funder.

P10 For clarity, I think that the second half of the first paragraph could be explained a little more clearly. Are the authors saying that usual care might, in practice, include chiropractic and other interventions too? Are they considering the impact of evaluating effectiveness, beyond efficacy?

P11 there is some repetition in the description of a QALY as there is a section which includes this on P6.

P11 The authors say that the EQ-5D appears to be less sensitive to change… Is this a report of what the panellists were saying, or is this the authors’ interpretation and critical appraisal following the panellists discussions? There are other considerations related to choosing health outcome measures beyond the sensitivity test described. Did the panellist consider other feasibility and validity issues in making these choices?

P12 I think it might be useful for the flow of the article to describe CCA when the authors describe other forms of types of economic evaluations on P6/7.

P12/13 The authors say that reporting outcomes for each health effect for each arm of the study may improve decision makers use of economic evaluation. In practice there are some objections in the literature regarding CCA too. It is not clear to me here whether the authors are simply reflecting the panel’s thoughts or whether they are looking to educate the reader.

P13 The authors report that the use of conjoint analysis may be helpful. I think it is worth describing this method, to illustrate any benefits this approach might have, given that the authors describe CEA, CBA etc.

P13 The panel discussed including the risk of future events as an outcome measure. It is perhaps worth noting that the time horizon used for outcomes would ideally be matched by the time horizon for resource use and costing to fully compare the streams of benefits and costs over time.

P14 The authors state that cost data reported by patients and practitioners often do not agree. Was there any discussion about how to deal with this (e.g. using sensitivity analysis to compare the impact of using one approach compared to another) but also, in relation to the comparator, what the impact might be?

P14 In the last paragraph the authors mention overall costs. I think it would be good to specify what is meant by this in more detail. This may relate to the perspective of the analysis.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The authors state that the panel discussions were recorded and transcribed. They do not say how/where the data is stored now. I do not know what the relevant standards are in this context therefore I cannot judge this.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion and conclusion sections are very short. It is not clear to me whether the panel results reflect the opinion of the panel as a group only or whether it includes the authors' suggestions based on the panel's opinions. For clarity, it would be helpful if these were clearly separated.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

The authors do not report any limitations of the study.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

The authors acknowledge the panellists. The references seem appropriate.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

I think the title could be changed to replace ‘recommendations from’ with something like ‘issues/considerations raised by’. I think there would need to be considerably more debate and discussion to come up with a more definitive set of recommendations. It might be easier for the reader to hold on to the recommendations from the panel if they were separated from the seven themes that were drawn from the panel discussions.

I think the abstract could be tightened up a little. In the background section of the abstract, the authors say that the panel was convened to examine the challenges faced in conducting economic analysis in CAIM whereas, from the first sentence in the Methods section of the abstract, the aim was to discuss what was needed to bring about robust economic analysis of CAIM. I suggest that author guidelines permitting, there’s a sub-section entitled aims.

- Minor Essential Revisions

P9 Typo CER has been variously been called...

P10 Typo In some cases chiropractic is already be considered..

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'