Reviewer's report

Title: New perspectives on patient expectations of treatment outcomes: results from qualitative interviews with patients seeking complementary and alternative medicine treatments for chronic low back pain

Version: 1 Date: 10 April 2014

Reviewer: Felicity Bishop

Reviewer's report:

Overall I found this manuscript to be a well-written and engaging report on a substantial qualitative study with important findings. I particularly liked the attention to discursive issues in interpreting the findings. A few suggestions for revisions follow the checklist answers.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?  
Yes

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?  
Yes, although some details are missing (see below).

3. Are the data sound?  
Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?  
Yes

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?  
Yes, although the extent to which the findings are transferable to other chronic illnesses and/or other CAM treatments could be considered.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?  
Yes, although there is other relevant literature that could be discussed (see below).

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

9. Is the writing acceptable?  
Yes, although it is a little wordy in places (see below).

- Discretionary Revisions
1. A few additional methodological details would enhance transparency of reporting: explain why participants had to be aged 20-70 years; describe the sampling strategy (e.g. maximum variation?) i.e. how interviewees were selected from among those who volunteered; state whether data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively or sequentially; explain how the analysis remained open to participants’ experiences despite using an a priori conceptual model; clarify confidentiality and anonymity issues.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. The terms ‘chronic low back pain’ and ‘chronic back pain’ and ‘persistent back pain’ are all used in various places in the manuscript when describing the focus/participants. It would be good to pick one term and use it consistently throughout.

2. Background paragraph 2 sentence 2 is missing a close bracket.

3. The language is a little wordy in places, which makes certain sections feel long (e.g. Interrelationships among domains; Conclusions). These sections could be tweaked to be more succinct.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. In some places ‘treatment expectations’ are referred to, in others ‘outcome expectations’, in others ‘expectations’. I would like to see a clear definition of the original theoretical concept that the authors focused on very early in the background.

2. I broadly agree with the assertion in paragraph 1 (background) that little research has focused on expectations patients have when beginning CAM therapies. However, I am aware of other published qualitative research (e.g. around how patients decide to try CAM and patients’ experiences of CAM, especially acupuncture) that is relevant and would help to contextualise this study better in the extant literature.

3. I would like to see some discussion of the specific CAM therapies included in this study – e.g. why were these 4 therapies chosen, do you think the findings would be transferable to other therapies, were there any differences between therapies (beyond those mentioned already in relation to yoga and physical fitness on p15).

4. Similarly, it would be interesting to hear the authors’ thoughts about the extent to which their findings might be relevant to patients with other conditions seeking CAM or whether these ways of thinking about expectations might only be found among patients with chronic back pain.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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