Reviewer's report

Title: The use of alternative therapies in the Saskatchewan stroke rehabilitation population

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Reviewer: Dr Sheila Greenfield

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the compulsory revisions

Compulsory revisions
1. Background page 2, first and second paragraphs: the authors quote a number of papers regarding the use of CAM by rehabilitation patients. It is not made clear whether these are patients undergoing stroke rehabilitation or other types of rehabilitation.
2. The authors state page 2, lines 1-3 that 'due to the chronic nature of many conditions treated in physical medicine and rehabilitation, the % of users appears to be high' but there is no clear rationale given for carrying out this study of CAM and stroke rehabilitation patients or of work which has led up to the study. The reader is not actually told at this stage whether there have been any previous specific studies on the use of CAM by stroke rehabilitation patients-if there have not then this would be a good reason for carrying out the study.
3. Page 2, paragraph 3: the authors state that 'physician attitudes towards alternative medicine have also been examined' and some examples are given. It might be best to restrict the examples here either to the Canadian context, or to physicians in rehabilitation settings. There have been a considerable number of studies examining physician attitudes to CAM in a wide range of different countries. They are too numerous to include here and to select a few examples does not give an accurate picture.
4. Page 2, paragraph 4: it would be better to say e.g that most patients do not discuss CAM with their doctors. There is a wider range of more recent references which make this point than the two 1993 papers quoted.
5. Page 3, lines 9 & 12: correct spelling, St John's Wort
6. Page 3, Methods: it is not stated in which year the study was carried out
7. Page 3, Methods: during what period did the 136 eligible patients undergo rehabilitation?
8. Page 4, Methods: how long after their event were they interviewed?
9. Page 4, Methods: paragraph 2 list of 12 treatments. Where did this list of 12 treatments derive from was it a list used in other surveys e.g. a list of treatments commonly used by rehabilitation patients?
10. Page 4, Methods: paragraph 4, data analysis. The 3 lines explaining this are insufficient and there needs to be a description of exactly what analysis was carried out and why. Crystal Reports needs a definition. Why were statistical tests carried out on some of the data and
not others?

11. Page 5, Results: Details of all the data collected are not fully reported e.g. on page 1 of the questionnaire. Gender comparisons of variables are selectively reported. It would have been interesting to compare patients' CAM behaviour related to their length of time post-stroke and current health status

12. Page 5, Results, 3rd paragraph. How many patients used more than one therapy?

13. Page 6, Results: lines 1 and 2. Percentages are missed out - numbers and percentages should be presented in uniform style throughout the text

14. Page 6, Results: paragraph 4: The information contained in Table 3 could be usefully put in the text. How many patients gave more than one reason for stopping?

15. Page 6, Results: the authors mention here for the first time the fact that previous studies have looked at stroke rehabilitation patients and CAM. This should be made clear in the Background section and the findings of these studies summarised to set the context for the current study

16. Page 7 Results: line 3. The authors quote 3 other studies which they say are comparable studies - how are they comparable - in terms of methodology, medical condition, country?

17. Page 7 Results: line 4. 'Many patients could not say why they were taking alternative medications'. The questionnaire did not specifically ask this question. Q8 appears to focus more on what medical problem they were using it for

18. Page 8, 1st paragraph and 1st paragraph of Conclusion: this tends to repeat information that has already been given

Tables 1-3: n= needs to be included here

Competing interests:

None declared.