Reviewer's report

Title: Content Validity of Manual Spinal Palpatory Exams. A Systematic Review

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Reviewer: Charlotte Leboeuf-Yde

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

Advice on publication: Other (see below)

Compulsory revisions:

1. The final article should contain a full reference list of all articles considered for review, as there are no problems of space in electronic publishing.
2. Abstract, Methods, 1st sentence: Please, place the words "were undertaken" at the end of the sentence, or it will look as if you undertook this job from 1965 till 2001.
3. Background, 2nd paragraph, last sentence. You make a statement about outcomes and effectiveness of SMT procedures without substantiating it with a reference. As there is no evidence for what you state, it would be a good idea to write something like "The assumption is that outcomes and effectiveness of ..."
4. P.7, 1st para, last sentence: You list various validation aspects. As there is some confusion in the literature on this, you will need to add a reference for the classification system that you have chosen to adhere to. However, full marks for explaining your rationale and methods very clearly throughout the manuscript!
5. P.15, first para. You speak of blinding of examiners and subjects. However, it is also important that study subjects are naive, in relation to what one can expect in relation to the experiment. It is for example, possible that students or practitioners with an insight into the rationale for a method, or a preconceived idea of the outcome of a test, consciously or subconsciously may influence the test outcome, also when they are study subjects. You need to either change your checklist, or relate to it afterwards, and see if this item was indeed relevant in your final data material, or discuss it in the end.
6. p.17. Your consensus procedure is well described. However, a method is only as strong as its weakest link. In your last sentence, 1st para, you state: "When reviewers failed to arrive at a consensus on the quality score, two content experts reviewed and scored the article." but you forgot to tell us, if you settled for their mean score, or if they both had to agree before the score was given, and what they did if they did not agree, and if they did the scoring independently or together in an atmosphere of consensus...
7. p.18, first para, last sentence. You provide the reference for one study "(Kristiansson)" but not for
"the other study".
8. Page 23, second para, 9th line: You should start a new paragraph at the sentence starting with "Altered motion has been difficult to validate..."
9. Please check the document for the noun "phenomenon". It is written "phenomenon" as singular and "phenomena" in plural. You seem to treat it as plural even when it decidedly is only a question of ONE phenomenon. It happens twice in the first para on p.24 and also (at least) on p.27, second line.
10. p.24, second para, secnd sentence. You write that few studies hae attempted to assess the validity... I think it would be a good idea that you specify what sort of validity, unless you are discussing this in a general way.
11. p.27, 1st para, last line. Are you sure that your choice of reference 27 is an honest one? You speak of "other systematic reviews". Unless ref. 27 is a review of other reviews, you cannot speak of other reviews (in plural).
12. p.27, 2nd para, line 2: "it's" should be "its".
13. In relation to the reference list, please indicate specific page numbers in the book references number 7,12,13 etc.
14. I have not checked your reference list for accuracy but I have, egocentrically, noted that ref. 28 is incorrect. The first author's name is "Hestbaek" and not "Hestboek". If you order the article you will see that it is correctly written as published. The "Hestboek" spelling appears in the Medline abstract. Also my name is incorrect. It should read "Leboeuf-Yde C" and not "lebouef YC". Also, you should write the journal's name in full (not JMPT but J Maniulative Physiol Ther, as you did for example in ref. 25. You also need to check the reference through for the same error in several places (for example refs 23 and 24).
15. p.37, ref 4: there should be a full-stop not a comma after the name Moruzzi S.

Discretionary revision:
. P.6, 3rd paragraph, last sentence. Your example with the arrow, should perhaps read "same point" rather than "target area".

GENERAL COMMENTS

In my opinion, this paper, although it requires some improvements can already by accepted for publication. It fulfills all your preset quality criteria. However, the options provided below (Advise on publication) does not contain the item i would select "Accept with minor revisions". For this reason I have ticked the "other" box.

Competing interests:
None declared.