Reviewer's report

Title: The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) by African American (AA) and Caucasian American (CA) Elders in a Rural Setting: a Descriptive, Comparative Study

Version: 1 Date: 10 September 2003

Reviewer: Kathleen Wren

Reviewer's report:

General
There appears to be a number of places where words run together--so space between words--this may have to do with how my printer prints things up, but just in case, please be sure to review the article and make sure this is corrected.

Very nice discussion concerning recruitment at community churches and money expenditures (last two paragraphs of discussion section).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Minor Compulsory Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Second paragraph under Background: "research studies have not been representative of the use of CAM..." would remove "have not been representative" (this is a very nontraditional way of stating it) to something more indicative that this has not been studied.

Need reference for statement that there is limited access to medical care in the rural setting as some rural places are very well served. Perhaps a reference to the majority of health professional shortage areas occur in predominately rural areas would work.

Need reference for: "the older population is a group that has more chronic illnesses, takes longer to recover when sick, and often needs more health care services than their younger cohorts..."

Also, the completion of that sentence (from above): "resulting in the use of CAM that may be influenced by folklore and cultural beliefs." Is this a fact that decreased access to traditional/conventional health care results in the use of CAM? If so, please provide ref. If it is an assumption of the authors, than adding "this may result in use of CAM...." would be more appropriate.

Instead of stating "use of CAM" throughout the paper, the authors could say "CAM use" and drop the extra proposition.

Income is not needed in parenthesis after poverty in the sentence: "Poverty (income) is more widespread in rural areas..." If poverty is more widespread, then income cannot be more widespread.

The sentence: "By the year 2020, older adults will make up 25% of the total population." --needs a qualifier, such as "it is estimated" and needs a reference.
The sentence: "Lack of information is available regarding specific costs..." should be fixed as it seems like a double negative to talk about the availability of lack of information.

In regards to the statement: "Few CAM therapies have FDA regulations to guide choices made about CAM"--needs to be adjusted. The FDA regulation jurisdiction involves medicines and medical devices--not therapies. Perhaps the authors are trying to discuss the lack of FDA regulation on herbals due to their classification as dietary supplements--a very real concern that should be addressed.

Use characteristics instead of "correlates" in the sentence: "The demographic correlates that predict this use of CAM..."

In looking at the research questions the authors list: "What CAM modalities are being used by rural older adults?" I thought the study was comparing African American and Caucasian American older adults--a subgroup of Older Americans.

Please state institution where IRB approval was granted.

I missed what "SES" stands for in the article--please make sure this is listed out.

Since CAM is used more by white females with higher education, please address how this might effect CAM use in your defined population--you would have expected lower use in your African American sample based on their demographics.

I am confused as to why the authors specifically listed glucosamine and chondroiton but then grouped vitamins and herbs in big categories.

Throughout the article the authors provide p levels, but not for "CA use more CAM per person than AA with significant findings in the use of glucosamine by CA." Please provide p level for this statement.

Another reason prayer might be used more frequently by elderly is that end of life issues (facing death, illness, etc) may increase the use of spiritual interventions and prayer.

Was there anything in your student that would indicate these elderly residents of a rural state would be more likely to grow their own herbal remedies and thus be more likely to use them (due to decreased cost or increased access?)?

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

You cannot state that "AA do not use vitamins of chiropractic medicine as much as CA" since this did NOT reach significance. It would be better to state that you approached significance and that perhaps with a larger sample you may be able to find a significant difference (which is related to incidence rate, variation, and power).

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

Level of interest: An exceptional paper

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
Declaration of competing interests:

None