Reviewer's report

Title: Practice Patterns of Naturopathic Physicians: Results From a Random Survey of Licensed Practitioners in Two US States

Version: 1 Date: 16 August 2004

Reviewer: Andrew Vickers

Reviewer's report:

BMC Boon on naturopathy

This is a straightforward paper and I have no particular problems with the methodology.

Major revisions:

The description of the sampling is not clear. For example, it appears that all providers were contacted but on page 9 it states that interview were conducted with "randomly selected providers". It would help to have a flow chart describing the sampling methods, and the point at which providers were excluded and why.

Minor revisions:

a) The null hypothesis implied by the inference statistics ("there is no difference between naturopathic practice in Washington and Connecticut") is uninteresting. I do not find it necessary to raise hypotheses about any differences in practice patterns and I suggest leaving the data to speak for itself.

b) The use of Taylor series linearizations to calculate standard errors for a study of this nature is rather over the top, especially as standard errors are not reported in the results. The only place that they are relevant are for the inferential comparisons on table 1 and these, as I argue above, should be omitted.

c) The complex statistical methods may also have been used to calculate standard deviations in table 1 (for practitioner age) and 2 (for care hours and number of visits). In all cases it would be more useful to report the results as categories, e.g. number of patient visits per week: 1 – 15: 6 (10%); 16-25: 30 (50%); 26 – 35: 24 (40%); 36+: 6 (10%). This would be more informative (especially given that these data are skewed) and would avoid the need for complex analyses.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

none