Reviewer's report

Title: Complementary and Conventional Medicine: Concept Mapping with an Expert Panel

Version: 2 Date: 25 September 2003

Reviewer: marja verhoef

Reviewer's report:

General

Developing a valid and relevant questionnaire of patterns of CAM use is much needed and it is encouraging to see a study that aims to address this. The results are interesting but could have more impact if presented somewhat differently (see below).

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)

1. In the abstract, include an objective. Also identify the method first (concept mapping) and then discuss data collection. It might be better to list the clusters rather than trying to interpret the results.
2. Panelists are probably better called practitioners with a wide range of backgrounds rather than experts. Also I'd use variety of backgrounds rather than viewpoints, as the latter is only assumed by including practitioners from different backgrounds.
3. It would be helpful to include the cluster number in the figures. Also, in the text figure 2 comes before figure 1.

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

1. The research question is not explicitly provided. The objective appears to be to assess patterns of CAM use, however, the question participants were asked is: "One thing we should ask in a survey of SAVAHCs patients regarding complementary and alternative medicine is…", which is much broader than patterns of use. It is my understanding that concept mapping is especially useful for abstract concepts. What is the concept in this question?
2. The focus groups are presented as the first method (first step?) to develop a CAM questionnaire. Given there were 10 focus groups it is surprising that so few statements came from the focus groups as compared to the concept mapping process. It appears that the focus groups addressed different distinct objectives (Kroesen et al, 2002, ref. 7), but that the results could also be used to provide statements for this study. Therefore, it may be better to include the focus group study in the Introduction/background section, which should not be part of the Methods section.
3. Concept mapping is explained partly in the background paragraph, as a separate paragraph and is interwoven with the process of data collection and with the study results. I think it would be helpful to clearly define and explain succinctly what concept mapping is and to identify the relevant aspects of this method in the methods section before recruitment and data collection is addressed. This should include steps involved in the process, statistical analysis, structure of the map and guidelines for interpreting such maps (e.g., position of the cluster, layers, etc.)
4. The results section is quite lengthy and mixes presentation of the clusters, and interpretation of
the meaning of the axes. It would be helpful to first identify the clusters, to be systematic about the different characteristics of the clusters, and then review the relationships among the clusters.

5. The discussion on the other hand is quite brief. It was stated that the results were useful in the construction of a questionnaire, does that mean that one was developed? Was it used? Also, are the results if this study generalizable? Is saturation an aspect of concept mapping? If so was it reached? Would you recommend this method for questionnaire construction?

6. One of the key questions about CAM questionnaires is how to define or describe what CAM is, this did not come up as a major cluster. How did you (or will you) deal with this in the questionnaire, as questions about beliefs, attitudes etc will hinge on what respondents perceive CAM to be.

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

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None