Reviewer's report

Title: Complementary and Alternative Medical Therapies for Chronic Low Back Pain: What Treatments are Patients Willing to Try?

Version: 1 Date: 20 April 2004

Reviewer: kate J Thomas

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a well-written, interesting report.

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

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
1.) The abstract should contain more information about the sample and the response rate and should state that the sample frame was English speaking only.
2.) The conclusion should recognise likely response bias and state - Most patients with chronic back pain "in our sample" were interested etc..
3.) Respondents profile suggests some, inevitable, response bias. The possible impact of this should be acknowledged in the discussion section.
4.) Paragraph 2 page 15, final sentence does not make much sense to me. Could authors please clarify.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1) A table showing any known characteristics of the achieved sample compared with ineligible and non-responding subjects would boost the credibility of the results and aid interpretation, although I appreciate that information of this sort might be scanty, I wonder if the enrollment files have age and gender if nothing else.
2) Authors could consider running the regression analysis for a constructed variable relating to 'use of any therapy'. A comparison between this and the results for individual therapies would be interesting, and the might be easier to understand than some of the comparisons made in the text.
3) The fact that 64% of respondent were willing to try acupuncture (second only to 69% for massage) merits more attention perhaps, especially in the discussion in relation to the low level of reported knowledge of this therapy. This is mentioned in the results and very briefly in the discussion, but I think it stands out as a result in need of more explanation or at least reflection.
4) Page 15 - first 2 lines. I wonder of the relatively small proportion of people opting for chiropractic simply reflects the fact that this is more likely to be available via their Health Plan. Trials of CAM therapies are attractive to prospective participants because they want access to interventions that they feel are currently hard to access.
5) I am a little concerned about the multiple testing approach used in the analysis. Given the expertise of the authors, this concern may well be unfounded, but it reads a bit like over-testing in
the absence of a hypothesis driven strategy, with only a selection of the results reported. A statistician's view on this would be welcome.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'None'