Reviewer’s report

Title: Measuring changes in self-concept: a qualitative evaluation of outcome questionnaires in people having acupuncture for their chronic health problems.

Version: 2  Date: 22 December 2005

Reviewer: Hugh MacPherson

Reviewer’s report:

I am delighted to see this paper moving forward to publication, as I see it offering a very useful review and piloting of measures to capture an important aspect of change in therapist intensive interventions (i.e. beyond acupuncture). The author has much improved the paper along the lines I suggested, especially moving the Methods to its rightful place. However I have some concerns which I will outline below.

I find the use of “two” and “three” questionnaires used throughout the paper still confusing. I understand that two were selected from the literature review, but in terms of evaluation, all three were evaluated. Hence, the last paragraph, last two sentences, of the "Background" mention only the two (twice) when it would be much clearer to include all three here, perhaps with some explanation if necessary. Likewise the first paragraph of "Evaluating questionnaires" page 5 implies that the AIOS is not a questionnaire, yet later it is called one (i.e. page 8 at the start of the Results). Again on page 10, results are presented for “two questionnaires” but not AIOS. Page 15, the discussion again relates to “two” in the Discussion first paragraph. I suggest that three is used consistently throughout to avoid potential confusion.

A small point, it should be properly explained where AIOS came from, as it did not come from the literature review, so the author should explain why was this scale evaluated, as opposed to any other.

The ordering of references is now out of kilter, for example from refs 47 and 48 on page 5 they are wrongly ordered.

I understand from the responses of the author to the other reviewer that changes have been made to the description of the revised PEI. Now while I think it acceptable to not now rename it (as PEI-ac), I do think it very important that at the outset it is stated that this questionnaire was used in a modified way. This should be spelt out in the Methods (and not just alluded to later - page 13 - as currently). Specifically the methods should include the changed wording (as indicated in the first version of this manuscript.) It should be noted that the old label PEI-ac is still used on page 13.

I remain unconvinced that there is a sufficiently good explanation of why PEI and W-BQ12 when used in conjunction provide “many of the advantages and less of the disadvantages” of using either one by itself. I think the discussion should elaborate on this in a way that is accessible to the general reader.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'