Reviewer's report

Title: Patterns of complementary and alternative medicine use amongst outpatients in Japan

Version: 1 Date: 6 February 2008

Reviewer: Aslak Steinsbekk

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
The author must respond to these before a decision on publication can be reached. For example, additional necessary experiments or controls, statistical mistakes, errors in interpretation.

The references are old, the newest one is from 2001. Statement like "there is very little literature on prevalence in Far Eastern countries" reveals that the authors have not made even the simplest search. One example of a study that definitively should have been references is Yamashita H, Tsukayama H, Sugishita C. Popularity of complementary and alternative medicine in Japan: a telephone survey. Complement Ther Med. 2002 Jun;10(2):84-93. In other words, a more updated presentation of the current knowledge is needed in the introduction and this should be used in the discussion to put the current study in perspective.

The introduction focuses only on use of CAM in general populations. It should focus on studies in outpatient settings as that is what this survey is all about.

The literature referenced should also reflect the issues in the survey like prevalence, disclosure, perceived effect etc.

Definition of CAM. The exact wording used should be given in the methods and at least a discussion of the impact on the prevalence of using different criteria for which types of therapies to be included should be given. My opinion is that e.g. healthy eating is not a CAM therapy, although it is included in some studies, but the main point is that a clear definition is needed to understand how the authors thinks on this issue.

To more clearly identify the factors associated with CAM use, a multivariate analysis should be done (e.g. a logistic regression analysis).

The consequence for generalisability should be discussed more as the sample differs substantially from the general population with regards to education level. This raises the question if the sample also differs in other respects and if the survey method lead to some sort of systematic bias.

Minor Essential Revisions
The author can be trusted to make these. For example, missing labels on figures,
the wrong use of a term, spelling mistakes.

Discretionary Revisions
These are recommendations for improvement which the author can choose to ignore. For example clarifications, data that would be useful but not essential.

I think that all the strengths and limitations of the study should be presented together and not in between discussion of the results.

Too much of the information in the tables is also stated in the text in the result section.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests