Reviewer's report

Title: Motivations for consulting complementary and alternative medicine practitioners: A comparison of consumers from 1997-8 and 2005

Version: 1 Date: 7 January 2008

Reviewer: Aslak Steinsbekk

Reviewer's report:

The theme of the article is an important one as the time has definitively come for studies investigating changes over time.

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 major methodological point in this study is whether the difference in scoring of the motivations (yes/no vs. 6 point Likert scale) makes the comparison not valid. It is possible that having to decide between yes and no make people less inclined to answer a definitive yes to questions where a both yes and no answer would seem right to many people. This could explain the low scores in 1997-8 and thus the difference between the time points. New analyses using different cut off points (the present ones are not clearly stated) should thus be made. The author should then make a judgement if any difference might indicate that it is not possible to compare the data. If the author finds that the comparison is valid, this issue should be discussed in depths in the article.

In the methods section and in the footnote to figure 2 it is indicated that both self treatment and visits to a practitioner is included as CAM use. The influence of grouping this to types of use together should be discussed. It would be interesting to have analysis where those only visiting a CAM practitioner where compared with those only self treating with CAM products/techniques.

To more clearly identify the factors explain the difference between the two time points, a multivariate analysis should be done (e.g. having the time of the surveys as dependent variables in a logistic regression analysis).

The large differences in number of CAM offices used for recruitment should be discussed. It seems likely that this would influence especially the types of CAM modalities reported and thus also the validity of the comparison between 1997-8 and 2005.

The analysis and language used when describing the difference in motivation between 1997-8 and 2005 should be revised. As the absolute numbers are higher for all the six motivations in 2005, it is the relative difference that can say something more about changes. E.g. a separate analysis of the ratio between
push and pull factors between the two time points might be a way explore for changes.

Table 2: It is not clear what is meant with: â##CAM use in addition to versus instead of conventional medicineâ##, is it the proportion who uses both CAM and conventional or is it some sort of ratio? It is not explained in the methods section.

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.

Title should include â##in Canadaâ##.

Table 1: Include â##number ofâ## for the variables Acute /chronic health problems

It would be interesting to have some subgroup analysis based on variables like gender, length of use and education.

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 importance in its field

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