Reviewer's report

Title: A scoping review of research regarding Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and mass media: Looking back, moving forward

Version: 2 Date: 20 June 2008

Reviewer: Jeremy Segrott

Reviewer's report:

It is clear that the authors have made significant improvements to their paper. In particular they have addressed my key concern - the exclusion of papers on the grounds of methodological quality within their scoping review. I thank them for their thoughtful and detailed engagement with my original review comments.

I offer the following criticisms and observations as discretionary revisions and minor essential revisions.

Discretionary Revisions

In terms of my second key comment on the original manuscript, I still feel that the authors could provide a more persuasive rationale for their decision to exclude studies examining the internet. On pages 6 and 7 this rationale appears to be two-fold - the interactive nature of audience engagement with the internet, and the need to place limits on the scope of the review. Does the interactive nature of internet consumption make it less important? If there are differences in the ways in which audiences engage with TV, radio and newspapers and magazines, why not also include the internet? It also strikes me that in the UK, for instance, the BBC's news website now 'embeds' video and audio within its news pages, meaning that the distinction between TV, radio and the web is being blurred. And, on a related point, are some forms of traditional mass media becoming more interactive, if you can watch a TV show via the internet, and then join a web discussion, for instance?

In relation to my third point (the possible existence of research on audience reception of mass media on CAM 'hidden' within broader studies) I accept the authors' argument on this point. Perhaps they could suggest in their discussion section possible ways in which this area of work, and that relating to the internet could be developed in the future. At present the discussion appears to concentrate more on how research should be conducted (particularly in relation to collaboration).

Page 5: the comparison between scoping reviews and systematic reviews strengthens the paper. Mention could also be made of non-systematic literature reviews here, which it could be argued lie between scoping reviews and systematic reviews in terms of breadth and comprehensiveness.

Page 15: Discussion of related risks and safety
I thought this section of the paper raised many interesting issues. Is there a suggestion here that CAM is inherently risky? The authors could say more about how the linking of positive portrayals with the minimisation of risk constructs CAM in particular ways. Would we view coverage of orthodox medicine (such as primary care consultations) in the same way? It could be argued that some forms of CAM can portray themselves as very safe, because they only use natural products, and that some therapies - such as homeopathy, are often criticised in relation to efficacy rather than safety.

Page 19: I agree with the suggestion that "Researching CAM as a unified concept is not that meaningful", and that we need to look at the important differences between different therapies. However, I would suggest that there is still a place for studies that engage with CAM as a broad category, given its internal complexity and diversity. The authors themselves use CAM as a category for defining and understanding their review.

Minor essential revisions
Title (and subsequently): the phrase 'research regarding' could be replaced with 'research on'.

Title (and subsequently): the word 'the' could be inserted before 'mass media'.

Abstract, line 3: The word 'perhaps' makes the meaning unclear here.

Abstract (last line before conclusion): I found this sentence rather confusing.

Abstract (first sentence in conclusion): Who needs to attend to these issues?

Page 11, para 2, line 5: Typo here.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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