Reviewer’s report

Title: The potential of complementary and alternative medicine in promoting well-being and critical health literacy: a prospective, observational study of shiatsu

Version: 1 Date: 16 May 2009

Reviewer: Iris R Bell

Reviewer’s report:

This paper addresses the promotion of potential health literacy and sense of well-being in patients receiving shiatsu in a 6-month longitudinal study in three European countries. Data derived from mailed questionnaires that included open-ended questions about the experience of treatment and the outcomes. The findings included favorable perceptions of lifestyle changes and personal growth as a result of the treatment experience, including the interaction with the practitioner.

Overall this is a valuable addition to the literature on the whole person effects of CAM interventions as a package (practitioner effects plus specific treatment tools).

Some additional citations would enrich the discussion of the findings:

1. it would be helpful for the author to include a brief description and discussion of any inter-country differences and potential sources of such differences. If no differences occurred, a comment on why this may be the case would be helpful (major)

The remainder of the items below would be considered minor revisions:

2. Either in the introduction or the discussion, the author should add a citation of the Honda and Jacobson paper (Prev Med. 2005 Jan;40(1):46-53) in terms of their finding of elevated levels of openness to experience in the core personality traits of CAM users. Since the current study was observational in nature, it relied on people who chose to receive shiatsu treatment. Such people may be different from the general population and may contribute to differences between observational study populations and those drawn into randomized controlled trials by other recruitment methods.


4. Given the reliance of the data on self-report, the author should also acknowledge the potential confounding factor of participants giving socially
desirable responses on the questionnaire (e.g., the usefulness of including a measure such as the Marlowe-Crowne Scale or another similar measure to assess and control for these confounds in self-report data. A substantial literature in health psychology suggests the importance of the impact of denial of negativity in these individuals, and the trait is common across the population.

5. Early work by Lorig et al in the Stanford group on improved self-efficacy as a factor in better outcomes and lowered health care utilization of patients with chronic diseases may also be relevant to putting the current findings in context, esp. since health behaviors did not actually change, just the patient’s self-perceived efficacy in dealing with the health issues.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I am a consultant to Hyland’s Inc, a homeopathic product manufacturer, whose products would not be directly affected by this study of shiatsu.