Reviewer’s report

Title: Exploring integrative medicine for back and neck pain - a pragmatic randomised clinical pilot trial

Version: 2 Date: 8 June 2009

Reviewer: Stéphane Poitras

Reviewer’s report:

The authors have satisfactorily addressed most of the points of concern in the revised version. However, certain elements need to be further addressed.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Comment #8. The authors should be applauded to have collected data to assess possible contamination between groups (table 3). However, results seem to demonstrate that there was extensive contamination in the conventional arm, which could partly explain the lack of difference between groups. More than a quarter (25.5-33.3%) of the subjects in the conventional arm appeared to have received complementary therapies. Although I agree with the advantages of a pragmatic trial, this contamination makes it difficult to isolate the effectiveness of the IM. This was partly discussed by the authors on p. 15 and 16, but contamination and its impact on the results should be further discussed.

2. Comment #10. The authors have not convinced me on the psychometric properties and necessity of the proposed tailored outcomes, namely the 11 point scales for disability, stress and well-being. Particularly worrisome is that the stress and wellbeing scales were chosen based on face validity only. For disability, only one item of the Bournemouth questionnaire was chosen, and modified. However, the psychometric properties of the Bournemouth are for all of the combined items, not individually. There are numerous well validated instruments available to assess the dimensions of disability, stress and well-being. I would suggest that the main outcome measure would be the SF36. Power calculations could then be made with this instrument, of which there are numerous available data for SD and minimal important change for chronic LB and neck pain patients seen in primary care.

3. Comment #15. Why were non-parametric analyses used with the SF36 (QoL)?

4. Comment #16. The authors have analysed if there were differences with drop outs on gender and age. However, the important difference to assess would be on baseline outcome measures. If drop outs tended to have significantly different baseline measures, this could partly explain results.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Comment #15. In logistic regressions, there is one dependant variable and several independent variables. This should be corrected on page 9.
Discretionary Revisions
None

**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'