Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative study of naturopathy in rural practice: A focus upon naturopaths' experiences and perceptions of rural patients and demands for their services

Version: 1 Date: 30 March 2010

Reviewer: Dugald Seely

Reviewer's report:

This paper consisting of a qualitative study of naturopathic doctors (NDs) in rural Australian practice is an interesting and needed addition to the literature for an area that is poorly reported on and inadequately assessed. The rural setting is one in which often little health services are provided and also seems to be given short shrift in attention. Naturopathic doctors are front line health care practitioners for many people and this is likely more pronounced in rural settings. This paper outlines some important issues and perceptions of the rural population in both how the naturopaths perceive how their care is received and what barriers exist to rural practice.

Major Compulsory Revisions
- none required

Minor Essential Revisions

1. How representative is the Darling Downs region of South-East Queensland to the rest of rural Australia? This deserves a bit more discussion perhaps with emphasis placed on regional and comparative socioeconomic status, ethnic profile, occupation, and demographics. It would be helpful to know a bit more about the populace represented.

2. What is the training of the NDs? Is there a wide variability between practitioner training and treatment approaches? How does this tie in with both interpretation and perceptions and choices around care. This information may not be empirically based, but it would help the reader to provide more context of just what an ND is in Australia and how they practice.

3. What are the implications from the findings of this qualitative research in terms of public health policy? Are there particular suggestions to be made to the Regulatory bodies as a result of these findings?

4. Self selection of naturopaths and their respective practice is an issue that could influence the findings and bias the generalizability of the results. This needs further discussion.

5. Triangulation of perception through interviewing patients would have strengthened the reliability of these findings. This could be discussed as both a limitation to interpretation and a potential good option for future follow up
research.

6. In the discussion section, 2nd sentence, an “…overlapping approach to health across rural populations …” is noted. This does not appear to be substantiated nor explored from the current research, consider omitting or rephrasing.

7. Discussion makes reference to CAM care throughout when really the study findings should apply largely to naturopathic practice. More emphasis on the ND focus seems warranted as the larger picture of CAM is not really addressed by this work. This applies most to the early part of the discussion and the conclusion section (both in text and in the Abstract).

Discretionary Revisions

1. Last sentence of the 1st paragraph in the Background section is too long and a bit awkward.

2. Mentioned that pseudonyms are used to mask participants although initials are provided at the bottom of the quotes.

3. Bottom of page 13, rephrase sentence with … in particularly…

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