Reviewer's report

Title: What factors explain the amount of utilization of physical therapy care in patients referred with low back pain: a multi level analysis

Version: 1 Date: 29 June 2005

Reviewer: deirdre hurley

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper considers a topic of interest to physiotherapists, health providers and policy makers. The authors have maximised the data available from a national database and considered the influence of patients, therapists and practices on number of treatments for the first time. However, there are other aspects of the topic of utilisation, notably its cost implications and comparison with other countries that need to be considered.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The text should be written in the past tense.
2. The introduction should provide a stronger justification for this work from an international perspective by comparison with previous literature.
3. The concept of standardisation of treatment for a condition as generic as nonspecific low back pain needs to be justified - there are many other factors such as LBP classification, clinical reasoning, patient progression/regression and satisfaction that should be considered in introduction and discussion.
4. The title should be changed to 'number of physical therapy sessions' instead of 'utilisation of physical therapy care' which implies treatments will be explored.
5. The background section of abstract and first paragraph of introduction do not relate to the topic of the paper and should be amended. Rather they consider treatment variation which is not the focus of the paper.
6. The aims should clearly state number of treatments.
7. The cost implications of utilisation of physiotherapy services should be discussed.
8. The mean number of treatments at 10 is higher than other countries have previously reported - their data should be compared to the current paper and reasons for differences explored in the discussion.
9. The use of only private practices is a limiting factor that should be discussed.
10. Have the authors considered potential bias by including only those who volunteered for the study from the database?
11. Can the authors provide evidence of the representativeness of the sample - as the referencees cited are not in English.
12. The definition of chronic LBP (over 1 month) is not consistent with international LBP guideline classifications that are normally 3 months and needs to be referenced.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.