Reviewer's report

Title: Health costs in anthroposophic therapy users: a two-year prospective cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 22 March 2006

Reviewer: Peter H. Canter

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a well written paper which resists overstating the very limited implications of its findings. The main limitation of the study is the lack of a control group which means that the health benefits mentioned in the introduction cannot be attributed with any confidence to the AM intervention and also that the significance of the observed cost changes over the three years of the study cannot be assessed.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The conclusion as stated is not a conclusion - it is a restatement of the main result. The conclusion should be something like: "There was a reduction in costs in the second year but whether or not this was the result of the treatment given cannot be ascertained from the uncontrolled study design employed"
2. The discussion of strengths and limitations fails to adequately address the absence of a control group. It should explicitly state that this as a limitation to the study and spell out that similar or even lower costs might have been observed with conventional or no treatment.

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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)
1. In abstract "reduced by -416 euros" is a double negative remove -. Also recurs at the end of the discussion
2. In methods exclusion criteria: the meaning of ">30min for main diagnosis respectively" eludes me
3. Data analysis. How can this be an intention to treat analysis if inclusion of data depended on obtaining at least 3 of 5 questionnaires and n=94 were excluded for this reason?
4. discuss the issue of health status determination by the AM physicians in a study designed to assess costs for a health insurance company

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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: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'