Reviewer's report

Title: The effectiveness of the McKenzie method in addition to first-line care for acute low back pain: A randomized controlled trial

Version: 2 Date: 17 December 2009

Reviewer: Julie Fritz

Reviewer's report:

I appreciate the authors' efforts in responding to the previous comments.

I do not completely agree with the authors' response to the request to consider expressing the results as a proportion of patients achieving a threshold level of improvement on the primary outcome as well as mean between-group changes. This is an approach that is advocated by many and can be considered an aspect of "best practice" in reporting the results of clinical trials because it improves the interpretability of the results, which should be an important consideration in reporting. The authors' concern about the differing results based on different thresholds speaks to the need to pre-define a valid threshold, it does not speak to the usefulness of the approach per se. Although I disagree with the authors on this issue, I understand the published protocol did not include this approach to the analysis.

I also have some disagreement with the authors' contention that a sensitivity analysis evaluating patients who were adherent to the exercise protocol is not an aspect of "best practice". The CONSORT statement indicates that in instances where compliance is an issue, this type of analysis in addition to the intention-to-treat analysis can be informative. Unfortunately the degree of missing information on subject adherence in this trial would make this sort of analysis difficult.

I do not have any further recommendations for this manuscript.

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Accept for publication in BMC Medicine without revision

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