Reviewer’s report

Title: Second opinion for degenerative spinal conditions: an option or a necessity? A prospective observational study

Version: 1 Date: 03 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Sabrina Donzelli

Reviewer's report:

I want to acknowledge the authors for this work, it is very interesting topic and original comparison!

The results of the present research give a contribute to the current knowledge of back pain.

I have some concerns for the methods section: the statistical tests used are not clearly stated. You refer to descriptive statistics but you don't specify which kind of tests, in the results I don't see a typical table 1 with demographic characteristic of the sample. How did you compare the different opinion of experts? Did you find any agreement? I think that reporting the level of agreement would be more interesting than only rates of patients with the same opinion. The MCID you defined for pain at VAS, was decided on which basis? Please add a reference or justify your decision clearly. In the table you report a p value, but it is not clear to which statistical test it comes from. You didn't define if the sample showed a normal distribution and if you used parametric or non parametric tests. The methods section can be used by other authors to replicate the same study, so you have to give more details.

RESULTS I think that the selection process illustrated in figure 1 partains to the methods section rather than to the results one.

For the treatment outcome, I suggest to clearly define the outcome measures and than report the rate of subjects who reached the outcome, reporting only numbers is a limit. I also suggest to summarize more the results. I mean the number are listed in the tables and graphs please use few sentences which clearly describes your findings. It's very hard to focus on the main results for the reader, and considering the clinical impact that such study could have I think it is fundamental that all the readers have a clear idea of what you have found.

DISCUSSION: The discussion should be organized a little better, with a general comment on the results, some comments on the interpretation and on previously published paper and then source of bias and limitation of the study. From line 8 you discuss about the limitation of the study, but in reality you are referring to source of biases, which is much more related to results
interpretation and cautions. The limitation of the study includes the sample size, the large disagreement you found and the difficulties related to measuring pain. (did you consider pain a continuous variable? and Disability?)

Did you have an idea of the costs of second opinion and surgeons board evaluation? It would be interesting to add a cost analysis.

I strongly encourage the authors to reorganize the article to make it suitable for publication.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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