

Reviewer's report

Title: Topical NSAIDs for chronic musculoskeletal pain: systematic review and meta-analysis

Version: 1 **Date:** 17 May 2004

Reviewer: Marc Hochberg

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors have updated their prior systematic review of the efficacy of topical NSAIDs that appeared in the BMJ in 1998. The methods and results are clearly presented and the manuscript makes an important contribution to the literature regarding treatment of chronic musculoskeletal pain, especially from osteoarthritis.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

None

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

It is not clear whether the present search that identified 60 target papers (see page 8) included the 24 papers that had been included in the original review. The authors note that 13 of the papers included in the original review were included in this review and that there were 12 additional trials. In the section on "Harm", it would be of interest to know whether there were any serious adverse events that occurred in the active-controlled trials that compared topical NSAIDs with oral NSAIDs; specifically, whether there were any upper GI bleeds or symptomatic ulcers. Also, the authors should provide information on number needed to harm (NNH), if appropriate. In Discussion, the authors should compare the efficacy of topical NSAIDs (see paragraph 2 on page 12) with that of oral NSAIDs (drawn either from another systematic review [e.g., BMJ Clinical Evidence, Cochrane Library]). These results should also be included these results in Table 3 (see last paragraph page 14).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None