

Reviewer's report

Title: Researching complementary and alternative treatments - the gatekeepers are not at home.

Version: 1 **Date:** 7 October 2006

Reviewer: Anton J de Craen

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors make an original contribution to the literature by critical observation of current research and clinical practice in both conventional medicine and CAM. The result is a reversed process of evaluation of interventions in CAM.

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

1. This manuscript lacks a detailed discussion of the most important methodological tools: randomisation and blinding. The authors do not distinguish between the purposes of the two tools, nor do they address them. In order to propose a valid new research paradigm for CAM, one needs a thorough understanding of methodologic issues involved. This does not seem to be the case. Here the authors make the same mistake as they "accuse" conventional researcher of who enter the field of CAM research: they seem not to have a good understanding of "context, paradigms, and philosophical understanding" of conventional reserach methodology.

2. How do they foresee the evaluation of safety of CAM interventions?

3. What methodology will be involved in effectiveness research. Merely observational research will not give valid estimates of effectiveness. The proposed strategy is not very useful if they do not provide critical methodological suggestions for research design.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Which journal?: Not appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of only archival interest, but might be suited to BMC Medical Research Methodology

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No