

Reviewer's report

Title: Is Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Cost-Effective? A Systematic Review

Version: 2 Date: 23 March 2005

Reviewer: Rod Taylor

Reviewer's report:

General

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

This manuscript describes a systematic review of the literature on the cost effectiveness of complementary. The manuscript is well written and clearly presented. It addresses an important healthcare policy issue.

General comments

1. The authors purport to update a previous systematic review on the same issue although this focused alternative medicine. However, the 'added value' of this update is unclear and should be more explicitly outlined. Furthermore it is not clear why if this is an update, the studies identified in the previous review have been excluded.
2. Pragmatic RCTs – throughout the paper, the authors state that 'pragmatic RCTs' are the gold standard context for collecting cost effectiveness data. This is not the only view on this issue. Many researchers (partic. Health economists) firmly believe that even pragmatic RCTs do not fully represent the real world of healthcare and would therefore advocate the collection of costs within an observational study design setting. The text needs to reflect this debate

Specific comments

1. Methods para 1 – definition of CAM rather diffuse, what is a 'DO'?
2. Methods – data extraction by only one reviewer. The potential impact to the quality assurance of the review should be discussed.
3. Methods para 7 – in the description of quality assessment, the authors should clarify that the additional criteria they have assessed relate to 'external validity' (generalisability) in comparison to the usual quality criteria that relate to the internal validity of studies. An additional criteria that could of be considered was the degree of inclusion/exclusion applied by studies.
4. Conclusions – "...the most benefit per unit cost" & typo line 7
5. Table – ensure that abbreviations also stated in full, Table 3 – why is 'costs in a row? & multivitamins is stated as excluded in the text? Table 4 – it would be very helpful to quote the actual cost effectiveness ratios.

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)

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

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

No conflict