

## **Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Patient satisfaction and side effects in primary care: An observational study comparing homeopathy and conventional medicine

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 21 November 2007

**Reviewer:** Douglas Roblin

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Manuscript Review

Patient Satisfaction and Side Effects in Primary Care: An Observational Study Comparing Homeopathy and Conventional Medicine

Summary

The topic of patient experiences with complementary medicine is an important one for health services research. In this paper, the authors report on findings from an observational study comparing patient experiences with homeopathic physicians and conventional physicians in Switzerland. Overall, the paper is well organized and written. A few minor revisions are recommended below. One major concern is the possibility that differential selection of homeopathic vs. conventional physicians for providing care may partly account for the different patient experiences reported in this paper. Several suggestions for addressing this issue are also presented below.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. In the discussion of limitations in this study (pp 6-7), the authors should acknowledge the possibility that differential selection of homeopathic vs. conventional physicians for providing care may also account for some of the differences in patient experiences reported in this paper. That is, some of the differences in patient characteristics among patients treated by homeopathic physicians and conventional physicians (e.g. higher educational levels and older age among patients treated by homeopathic physicians) may also be associated with higher levels of patient satisfaction. Several methods for addressing selection effects are noted below. In the limitations section, the authors might want to mention such methods, even if they choose not to rework the entire analysis.

Minor Compulsory Revisions

1. p. 3, Physicians and Patients: The reader might be assisted by knowing what percentage of the Swiss physician workforce consists of the 282 homeopathic physicians.
2. p. 3: a right parenthesis is missing from the phrase "(homeopathic physicians"
3. p. 3, Data Collection: delete one period in the sentence ending "...in the first part.."

4. p. 3, Data Collection: The sentence “Sampling days were defined...” is unclear. Do you mean “Days on which visits were sampled were determined by the study coordinator and....”?
5. p. 4, Data Collection: Rather than referencing Table 5 at this point, it might be better to list the 5 dimensions, for example: “.... dealing with 5 main dimensions: Relation and communication, ...”
6. p. 4, Data Management and Analysis: A reference for the classification of disease from the US National Center for Health Statistics would be helpful.
7. p. 5, Patient Evaluations, first sentence: missing space between HP and group in “HPgroup”
8. p. 6, Discussion: “Differences in communication patterns between CP...” might be better stated “This is the first time differences between CP and HP were reported” – if this is correct.
9. p. 6, Discussion: Add “of this study” so that the lead into the limitations section reads “However, some limitations of the study are to be taken into account:”
10. p. 6, Discussion: Given the focus of this paper on patient experiences, I don’t think the first mentioned limitation regarding completion of the physician questionnaire is necessary.
11. p. 6, Discussion, limitation 2: Change the first sentence to begin “The patient questionnaire....”, since this limitation appears to refer to the patient questionnaire specifically.
12. p. 7, Discussion: Following the limitations, begin the next paragraph “...between conventional and homeopathic medicine. In conventional care, ....”
13. p. 7, Discussion: At several points on this page, there appear extraneous brackets in the references: “[15, 26, 27]-38]” and [29, 30]30]”
14. p. 7, Discussion: Change the sentence “Possible explanation is” to “A possible explanation is....”
15. p. 7, Discussion: Begin the phrase “2) association between side effects....” as “2) the association between side effects....”
16. Table 4: The distributions of numbers of patients by side effects are reported, but percentages are missing.

#### Discretionary Revisions

1. Per major revision 1: Selection effects are pervasive in observational studies. The authors might have considered several methods for addressing differential selection of homeopathic physicians versus conventional physicians by patients in their assessment of patient experiences. One, cases (patients treated by homeopathic physicians) could have been matched to controls (patients treated by conventional physicians) on patient characteristics, such as age, gender, and educational level – which would have partly controlled for differences in the mix of patients treated by homeopathic and conventional physicians noted in Table 2. Another, similar approach would have been to use logistic regression using these same patient characteristics to estimate a propensity score for treatment by

homeopathic physicians vs. conventional physicians and then to match cases with controls on propensity score. Following either method, patient experiences would be compared between matched cases and controls. Either of these methods would be preferable to the LS means comparisons used in this study – although, the outcome would not likely be much different from what the authors have reported.

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

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.