Author’s response to reviews

Title: Diabetes and Hypertension guidelines and the Primary Health Care Practitioner in Barbados: Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Barriers

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Version: 2 Date: 12 November 2010

Author’s response to reviews:

12 November 2010
The Editor,
BMC Family Practice,
Dear Sir/Madam,

We thank the reviewer’s for their reports.

Reviewer Dr. Michal Shani has the made the point that Family Physicians and other primary health care workers, while often not the leading persons involved in creating or implementing the guidelines targeted at them, appear, from the results of this study, to have much to offer in this regard. The final sentence of the conclusions of the abstract, and also to the second sentence of the first paragraph of the discussion section of the main text have been added to reflect this idea.

Reviewer Dr. Joseph Azuri was unsure if the persons sampled were representative of primary care practitioners managing patients with diabetes and hypertension in Barbados.

For the public sector we conducted, as detailed in the methods section, one focus group at each of the 8 polyclinics which ensured we sampled personnel at all 8 polyclinics. It should be pointed out that we have far more nurses compared to doctors working in the polyclinics. Using data on the numbers of different professionals employed at polyclinics, we surveyed approximately 49% of the public sector physicians and 25% of the nurses. Nurses were therefore not over-represented. Point (b) by the reviewer asked us to clarify this. At the end of the first paragraph of the results section we have added our data on the makeup of professionals employed in polyclinics which we believe will lead the reader to conclude that nurses were not over-represented.

Involving the private sector in a focus group study was challenging. As most primary care physicians are in solo or small group practice we had to invite them to attend at a central point rather than go to their workplace. We selected 20 physicians off a validated list of private practitioners. However, several did not attend. Demographic data on the physicians who did not attend or were not
sampled is not available. However we do have data indicating that 68% of private physicians are male and this is in the paper. A more detailed comparison as requested in point (c) of participating physicians vs. those that did not participate is not possible. Very few private physicians employ a nurse, and we sampled all the private sector dieticians listed in the telephone book.

It should be noted that in recent years most new medical school graduates have been female. It is therefore not surprising that the younger polyclinic doctors are mainly female, unlike the older private sector doctors.

Point (d) by the reviewer queried the possibility that bias would result from the mean ages of the Polyclinic doctors being lower than the private sector doctors. It should be pointed out that the only quantitative assessment was the number of persons having heard of guidelines, and for the polyclinics the group included a large number of older nurses in addition to the younger doctors. We did not infer any statistical significance to our results. In fact, qualitative studies such as this one are not expected to study a rigorously determined representative sample of the underlying population.

We believe that 13 focus groups were an adequate number to capture most of attitudes and practices. The fact that we were hearing similar concepts from each focus group is evidence of this and considered adequate for qualitative studies.

The editor has requested that we amend the background section of our abstract to justify carrying out the research. We have added a sentence to correct this omission. The moderator’s manual will be uploaded as an additional file.

Please note that reference 9 in the manuscript refers to a paper that has been accepted for publication by BMC Research notes, but has not yet been published. The citation will need to be updated.

We hope that the above information and the changes made to the manuscript will be considered adequate responses to the reviewers’ and editor’s comments and that the paper can now be considered for publication.

Sincerely,

O. Peter Adams
Anne O. Carter