Author’s response to reviews

Title: Complementary or alternative? The use of homeopathic products and antibiotics amongst pre-school children

Authors:

Lesley Wye (lesley.wye@bristol.ac.uk)
Alastair D Hay (alastair.hay@bristol.ac.uk)
Kate Northstone (kate.northstone@bristol.ac.uk)
Jackie Bishop (Jackie.bishop@bristol.ac.uk)
Judith Headley (Judith.headley@bristol.ac.uk)
Elizabeth Thompson (Elizabeth.Thompson@ubht.nhs.uk)

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1559573450146160 - Complementary or alternative? The use of homeopathic products and antibiotics amongst pre-school children

Dear Dr. le Good

Thank you for your communication of 3 December 2007. We are delighted that BMC Family Practice is willing to accept our paper, subject to further revisions.

Reviewer 3 makes the following points:

- ‘There are no data in the paper to justify the statement “the characteristics of mothers giving homeopathic products to their children are similar to those associated with adults who self-administer”.’ We have clarified this to read:

Comparing the profile of general adult CAM users in the literature [14,33,34] to that of mothers who used homeopathic products for their pre-school children in this study, both groups share similar features, which is unsurprising as adults are making decisions in both cases.

- Insert the word ‘school’ before “O levels”.

Done.

- Acknowledgments – change to Royal London Homeopathic Hospital Research Conference: Improving the Success of Homeopathy 5.

Done.

- Reference 25 needs the journal name written out in full.

Done.

Reviewer 1 makes the following points:

- ‘The data are old and therefore out of date. Furthermore, this cannot be addressed.’

We revised the paragraph to read:

“The strength of this study is that it is the only community based study that addresses the question of antibiotic and homeopathic product use in pre-school children. Nonetheless, these data are now over ten years old and it is possible that the situation has changed. However, it is difficult to determine the direction of change. We do know that antibiotic usage has decreased [30]. But there are no recent surveys of homeopathic product or complementary therapy use amongst children in the community in the UK, although a recent hospital based study in Wales found that 8% of the children in its sample had used homeopathic products, which is comparable to our results of 6% for prevalence [21]. Furthermore, even in surveys that do exist there are different definitions of homeopathy and complementary therapies, making it difficult to compare trends over time. Potentially, studies on expenditure offer further insight on prevalence of use, but they are also scarce. Interestingly, the only survey on expenditure that has been repeated robustly at three time points (1993, 2000, 2004) found that spending on complementary therapies in Australia actually decreased from
Thus, although the data for our study were collected over a decade ago and could be out of date, given the paucity of information on homeopathic product use amongst community populations, it makes an important contribution.

- Another problem is the extent and direction of recall bias. Further information needs to be given.

ALSPAC is a well-known community cohort study that has been running for over 15 years. As it is a retrospective questionnaire based study, recall bias will be a difficulty with all results and consequently, according to Busato, all studies from this source will be scientifically “unsound”. Nonetheless, we asked ALSPAC if they have conducted any studies exploring the extent or direction of recall bias, and they have not. Consequently, it is difficult to know how to add any further information. We have, however, amended the paragraph to read:

“Like all studies using retrospective self-completion questionnaires, this study is subject to recall bias. This could have led to reporting of only the most severe or recent illness episodes and their associated treatment, in which case it may underestimate antibiotic and homeopathic product use. Parents may also have under-reported what they felt was more acceptable e.g. fewer hours of television watching. Unfortunately ALSPAC has not carried out any studies investigating the ‘true’ extent or direction of recall bias, so it is difficult to comment further. Response bias may also be present, leading to an over-estimate of antibiotic and homeopathic product use (as it is known that better educated, older mothers living in their own properties are more likely to complete questionnaires [32]).”

Thank you again for considering this paper and we look forward to receiving confirmation that it has been accepted for publication.