Author's response to reviews

Title: An analysis of online messages about probiotics

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews: see over
December 18, 2012

Mr. Mark Andrew Cardinez  
BioMed Central

RE: Revision to manuscript #1326562443747184  
Title: “An analysis of online messages about probiotics,” Brinich MA, et al.

Dear Mr. Cardinez,

My co-authors and I are pleased that you believe our work would be of interest to readers of *BMC Gastroenterology*. Attached is a revised version of our manuscript. Our responses to each of the individual comments by the referees and editors are described below.

To assist you in your review of our revised manuscript, we have included a “marked copy” of the revised manuscript that highlights the changes we have made. If you have any questions about the manuscript, you can reach me at 00-1-216-445-1257 (direct).

My colleagues and I thank you for considering our work for publication in *BMC Gastroenterology*. We very much appreciate your thoughtful suggestions and encouraging comments on our work.

Sincerely,

Richard R. Sharp, Ph.D.
Summary of Reviewers’ Comments and Author Responses (MS: 1326562443747184)

Editorial Comment:
“As you will see, one reviewer expresses some concern regarding whether your manuscript falls within the scope of the journal. We would like to reassure you on this point and can confirm that your study is within the scope of BMC Gastroenterology. We would be grateful if you could address the comments in a revised manuscript and provide a cover letter giving a point-by-point response to the concerns.”

Response: We appreciate your reassurance that our study falls within the scope of *BMC Gastroenterology*. Below we describe our responses to the individual referees’ comments.

Comments from Referee 1:
“This is an interesting paper assessing the quality of internet site about probiotics. It mainly focuses on the “scientific quality of those sites”. It contains many epidemiologic data and statistical analysis and less GI clinical or basic research information. Therefore in my opinion the paper is more suitable for publication in an epidemiologic journal or in a general medicine journal.

Response: Thank you for this feedback. We were reassured by the editor that our study falls within the scope of the journal and have submitted a revised manuscript that addresses the comments of Referee 2.

Comments from Referee 2:
“Strengths: Due to the lack of regulation on the use of probiotics by the Food and Drug Administration and the readily available internet information, patients with chronic gastrointestinal diseases typically rely on internet websites regarding the information usage efficacy and risks of probiotics. The authors should be applauded to take on this effort to systematically review these websites regarding their quality, which likely affects the usage of probiotics by patients. I consider this the major strength of this manuscript and I found the systematic analysis appealing enough to be read by a larger audience. In fact, it confirms our suspicions that commercial websites on probiotics are biased and frequently lack scientific rigidity on the benefits and the safety of probiotics. In addition, they are also found that these websites suggested the individuals such as patients and healthy individuals to consult a physician prior to using probiotics. This typically does not take place in real life. This underlines even more the necessity of providing adequate information on these websites, which is often lacking, and is commercially biased, confirmed by this study.

Minor concern:
On page 4, last sentence, the author stated that after two independent analysts coded websites for quality content, their respective scoring and code sheets were compared and used to establish a single consensus code sheet. The authors need to provide Kappa scores to see how much agreement there was between the two independent analysts. This is important, especially as this parameter regarding quality scoring of the websites is the most important one in the manuscript.”
Response: We appreciate this positive feedback and the referee’s suggestion to include Kappa scores. The Kappa scores that we calculated show a very high level of interrater agreement between our analysts (mean, 0.72). We have revised the text on page 4 to include those statistics and believe that including these statistics strengthens the paper. Thank you for the suggestion.

We thank the reviewers and editors for their time and thoughtful reviews our manuscript.