Author's response to reviews

Title: Media coverage of health issues and how to work more effectively with journalists: a qualitative study.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Mr Aldcroft,

Re: MS: 1759809306389621 Media coverage of health issues and how to work more effectively with journalists: a qualitative study.

Please find enclosed a revised manuscript for the above study. We have responded to the editorial requests and to the reviewer’s very helpful criticisms and believe they have helped make it a better paper. Please see below.

A tracked and clean version is provided. Please note that the changes to the references have been made to the clean version only.

I am requesting that we name the reviewers in the acknowledgements section.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours Sincerely,

Julie Leask
Major compulsory revisions:

**Reviewer 1**

*Compulsory revisions*

1. We have included reference to other key studies as suggested.

2. References to support this claim have been added.

3. We have removed this claim.

4. The aims of the study have been added, along with a stronger justification for how such a study helps public health professionals.

5 and 6. We have added a paragraph and table describing the sample and provided better clarity about the sample.

7. The information was gleaned from the data analysis – we were interested in framing but did not use such words with the journalists.

8. We have attempted to better drawn out how newsworthiness related to the fact these were medical stories as distinct form general stories and where overlap occurred.

9 and 10. Extra information is provided to support our contention it was health reporting rather than seniority which was the key difference. General reporters had 16.7 years on average and medical reporters had 17.8 years. We do not report this difference as it’s a qualitative study.

11. We have qualified the comment about localism by referring to the special roles of health reporters and how these are being threatened.

12. Other limitations have been reported as raised by the reviewer.

*Minor essential revisions*

1. References have been fixed. See clean version (not tracked one).

*Discretionary revisions*

1. We have elaborated on how the study can help better engagement with the mass media.

2. Reference to Gasher et al has been made. Our original literature search failed to find more studies than those cited.

3. We have included the dates for the surge in reportage of the avian influenza threat.

4. The manuscript has been reviewed for clarity and some sentences have been shortened.

5. A paragraph at the end has been added about the implications of our study for wider changes in the media.
Point 7: apriori interest: This question was asked at the end of the interview specifically in relation to reporting during a future pandemic. We are reporting these findings elsewhere but have yet to submit them to a journal.

8. Passing mention of avian influenza and pandemic planning: The main aim of the study centred on how news on pandemic influenza was and would be constructed. As important contextual and background information we sought general information about newsgathering processes. Participants were told the interview would involve two parts. The first related to general aspects of news making and the second would then focus on avian influenza. We agree that this still was an important contextual factor we have attempted to better weave this context into the paper.

**Reviewer 2:**
There is an increase in references to existing sociological work in this area. We have included specific reference to detailed guidelines for working with the media.