Author's response to reviews

Title: COPD Uncovered: An International survey on the impact of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) on a working age population

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Dear Vic

On behalf of the authors we are delighted that this manuscript has now been deemed acceptable for publication. This is an important survey which will attract many citations and has the potential to have a major impact on the lives of people living with COPD.

We have made the necessary changes to the layout and have attached the competing interests section on the submission. With regard to the comment regarding ethics approval, we have amended the manuscript to add further clarification as to the nature of this survey and the governance process we followed.

We would like to emphasize that this piece of work was classed as a survey (definition according the Merriam-Webster dictionary: ‘to collect data for the analysis of some aspect of a group or area’) and not an experiment (definition: ‘an operation or procedure carried out under controlled conditions in order to discover an unknown effect or law, to test or establish a hypothesis, or to illustrate a known law’). The nature and type of survey; being cross sectional and multinational in nature, loaned itself to a market research approach as we wished to recruit anonymous subjects from the general public in the six study countries. This has precedent in large scale international surveys among people with both COPD and asthma which have been published in other high quality journals (e.g. Rennard S, Decramer M, Calverley PMA. ERJ October 1, 2002 vol. 20 no. 4, 799-805 and Dockrell, M., Partridge, M. R. and Valovirta, E. (2007), The limitations of severe asthma: the results of a European survey. Allergy, 62: 134–141. doi: 10.1111/j.1398-9995.2006.01304.x)

Education for Health and the international steering group carefully considered the requirement for formal ethical approval before conducting this survey in 2009. It was the opinion of the members of this expert panel that this would not be required having scrutinized carefully the EPHMRA-ESOMAR regulations [http://www.ephmra.org/professional-standards.aspx: www.esomar.org/uploads/pdf/professional-standards/ICCESOMAR_Code_English_.pdf]

We were confident that this survey and its methodology met the definitions of the code and para 4.5 of these regulations state that ‘Market research whether involving healthcare professionals, patients, carers or members of the public does not require Clinical Research Ethics Committee or Independent Review Board approval (Institutional Review Board in the USA)’
For clarity the interviewers were asked to read out the following to people they approached (this comes directly from the questionnaire).

My name is XXX and I am calling on behalf of XXX a market research company specialising in medical / pharmaceutical market research. We are currently conducting an International study on behalf of a health charity amongst people who suffer from lung disease and would like to ask you to participate. Your opinions are very important and, as always, completely confidential. As a member of the EPHMRA-ESOMAR, we are bound by the Code of Conduct and all applicable laws protecting your personal data.

- Your responses will be used by us and the sponsoring health charity for market research purposes only.
- Your responses will be collated with other respondents and presented to the sponsor in an aggregated or anonymous form.
- Results in an aggregated format will be used in an academic article in the future.

We look forward to hearing from you with regard to the anticipated publication date.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely

Monica Fletcher
Chief Executive