Author's response to reviews

Title: What have we learned about communication inequalities during the H1N1 pandemic? A systematic review of the literature

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Boston April 19, 2014

Re: MS: 1905878039111130 "What have we learned about communication inequalities during the H1N1 pandemic? A systematic review of the literature"

Dear editor,

I am submitting the revised version of the manuscript titled, “What have we learned about communication inequalities during the H1N1 pandemic? A systematic review of the literature”, to the journal BMC Public Health addressing the comments provided by the editors and reviewers.

Please find below detailed responses to each comment/suggestion.

We want to thank you and the Reviewers for their thoughtful critique and suggestions. We have taken this opportunity to further improve our methods, expand the search, and update the results. We have tried to address the issues raised by the reviewers and, as a result, we believe that the manuscript has been considerably strengthened.

Revisions were made with special attention to the following objectives: (1) adhere to PRISMA guidelines and include a completed PRISMA checklist; (2) expand the search to additional databases, include only empirical studies and exclude editorials in this review; (3) improve the search strategies and present them (along with the numbers of unique/redundant articles found for each database used) in the manuscript; (4) expand the results section; (5) revise the discussion and provide clear recommendations on a future research agenda as well as how the review could be helpful to practitioners based on the study's findings.

Respectfully,
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Editor’s Comments:

Comment #1 - Databases
The critical points concern the exact nomenclature of the used databases and thesauri (Social Citation Index: do you mean Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)?; Psych Info: do you mean PsycINFO?).

Comment #2 - Search strategies
Search strategies should be provided for all the used databases, since they require different key words and search options. Reporting only for two databases is not enough.

Comment #3 – Search results
It is not clear yet how many manuscripts were found for each used database/thesaurus, how many of them were in common among the databases. Please provide a number of unique/redundant articles for each database. This should be clearly stated.

Responses to Editor’s comments #1-3: We thank the editor for the comments and agree with all of them. We took these comments very seriously and have taken this opportunity to conduct an overall review of our search strategies and the search results. In response to the comments from the editor and the ones from the
reviewers (see below), we have expanded our search to 6 other major health, communication and social sciences databases and added additional studies to strengthen our reviews. The search strategies (comment #2) and numbers of unique/redundant articles found for each database used (comment# 1 and 3) are presented in Table 1.

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**Reviewer 1:** The topic is of high interest and if well and properly addressed could provide useful information to the health-care workers, also from a practical point of view. An important tool of Evidence-based Medicine (EBM) is the systematic review (SR). Despite the importance of the treated topic, I feel that this review does not fully meet with the standards and rigorous requirements of a SR.

**Major Revisions**

**Comment #1 - Databases**

A SR requires a minimum of 2 databases to be searched and mined for collecting the available data and extract the evidences. Here, the authors have used PubMed and EMBASE. Apparently, this requirement is met, however I am not sure how much the choice of using EMBASE fits the task. EMBASE is a specialized database particularly dealing with pharmacology and pharmacovigilance literature. I would strongly suggest to use other more appropriate databases (such as Scopus, ISI Web of Science, etc.).

**Response:** We agree with the reviewer. We have expanded our search to 6 other major communication, social sciences, and health and medical databases and added additional studies to strengthen our reviews.

**Comment #2 - Search words**

The authors refer to references 7 and 8 for the list of key words. These references (by the same authors) do not provide the answer to which words have been used for the CURRENT SR, since they fit general emergency situation but not address specifically the influenza pandemics. Authors should provide a table or a list of used key words for THIS study.

**Response:** We agree with the reviewer. A list of key words used for each database has been presented in a table and added to this manuscript.

**Comment #3 - Inclusion/exclusion criteria**

In this SR, they are NOT clearly stated: instead of giving examples, authors should provide clearly written criteria for including or excluding an item.

**Response:** We agree with the reviewer. These criteria have been stated in the revised methods section.

**Comment #4 - Eligibility**

Usually, not-peer reviewed material is NOT included among the selected items (and this is instead the case for the editorials and commentaries that have been included in the manuscript). Authors should exclude these studies.

**Response:** We agree with the reviewer. The editorials and commentaries have been excluded in the revised manuscript. The methods and results sections have been revised accordingly.

**Comment #5 - Results and discussion**

These sections are concise and should be substantially expanded giving more details of the findings of the different studies and explaining in more depth how this SR could be useful for workers in the field of Public Health.

**Response:** We agree with the reviewer. We have substantially expanded the results section and included details of the findings from the expanded review. The discussion session has also been revised to include explanations of how this review could be helpful to public health practitioners.
Reviewer 2: Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. I read the paper with great interest, because the topic is very important for public health purpose. Unfortunately, I have a lot of concerns and the paper must be extensively revised before publication.

Major revision

Comment #1: I have a lot of concerns related to the inclusion of editorials in a review.

Response: We agree with the reviewer and have excluded the editorials and commentaries from the review. The methods and results sections have been revised accordingly.

Comment #2: You must rewrite the results section. For each topic, you must state how many papers report results according to your observations. Eg: 10 of 96 paper stated that….

Response: We agree with the reviewer. We have substantially expanded the results section and rewritten the result section to include details of the findings from the expanded review.

Comment #3: Discussion must be revised. This section must be structured as follow.
- main findings (what evidence results from your review?)
- strengths and limitations
In the conclusion section you must report the implications for public health authorities.

Response: We thank the review for the comments and have restructured the discussion session to include explanations of how this review could be helpful to public health practitioners.

Minor revision

Comment #1 - Abstract:
- Background: please, rephrase the sentence “act upon … inequalities”

Response: We have removed the sentence.

- Results: The sentence “consistent results… outcomes” is too vague for a results section. Please, be consistent in describing the main evidences emerged by the literature review.

Response: We have revised the abstract to better present our findings.

- Conclusion: delete the sentence “consistently… were identified”. You write “evidence found” … What evidence? It is not clear. Please, explain briefly what evidence have to be included in the development of the future communication campaigns, this is a main objective of your paper.

Response: We agree with the reviewer that some of these sentences were unclear and have revised the paragraph. We have also included findings that could be useful to the development of the future communication campaigns in this paragraph.

Comment #2 - Key words:
“H1N1, pandemic” or “H1N1 pandemic”? Please clarify

Response: To ensure we obtain a comprehensive search results, we used “H1N1, pandemic” as key words when collecting data. A list of key words used for the revised review has been presented in a table (Table 1) and added to the revised manuscript.
Comment #3 – Background:
- The sentence “Such inequalities… health outcome” must be rephrased. You must insert a reference.
- You must add some explanation about H1N1 pandemic (When did it start? How many people involved?)
- What is “form of virus”? Did you mean “strain of virus”?
- The sentence “The pandemic influenza… Spanish flu” is unclear. Please rephrase.
- Please replace “the objectives” with “the aim”

Response: We have revised the background accordingly.

Comment #3 – Methods
- What key words did you use for the research? You must state it clearly

Response: The key words used for this review has been presented in a table included in the revised manuscript.

- Be consistent. You must decide to write “Pubmed” (as in the abstract) or “Medline” (as in the text)

Response: Thank you. This has been corrected.

- You must explain inclusion and exclusion criteria

Response: The explanation of criteria has been added in the revised manuscript.

- You must report how many paper you find in Pubmed, how many in Embase and how many paper was in both archives

Response: The databases used for this review and the numbers of articles found from each database have been presented in a table (Table 1) included in the revised manuscript.

- Sentence “Title…investigations, etc.” is redundant

Response: Thank you. This has been corrected.

Comment #3 – Result
- 54% of studies derived their data from a random sample of population, 42% from a convenience sample, 4% from cluster sampling of the entire population. The remainder of the empirical studies (17%)…. 54+42+4+17=117%!!!! Please clarify.

Response: This section has been updated with new data and revised to make it clearer - 78% of the empirical studies are population-based studies and the remainder 22% are information environment analyses.

- It is unclear if the second paragraph of this section referred only to editorials

Response: This paragraph has been revised since we have excluded editorials from this review, as suggested.

- “To describe current … to classify the articles” must be deleted. This sentence is appropriate for method section.

Response: These sentences have been removed.

Response: These sentences have been revised and added clarification.

- page 12, first paragraph. You explain the role of social networks and of the traditional forms of mass media. The empirical studies that referred to this sentences probably were carried out among different people settings (younsg and adults or olds). Please explain

Response: These sentences have been revised and added explanation.


Response: These sentences have been revised.

- page 13: “motivator”? “deterrent”? What means?

Response: These sentences have been revised.

Comment #4 – Discussion
- “While … measures”. Please delete

Response: These sentences have been removed.