Author’s response to reviews

Title: A Survey of Health Professions Students for Knowledge, Attitudes, and Confidence about Tuberculosis, 2005

Authors:

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Version: 3 Date: 10 July 2007

Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you very much for the careful reviews provided by Victoria Elfrink and Anthony Harries. I address each of their points below:

Reviewer: V. Elfrink:

General

1. Comment: Put statement in abstract and conclusion of background re: needs assessment
Response: Both the abstract (Methods) and background (page 4) have been clarified as requested

2. Comment: "90% had attended at least one lecture...should include anecdotally at least some more common topics..."
Response: Results now include parenthetical notation (bottom of page 6)
(NTCC faculty reported common topics were epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment, and other content pertinent to their specific discipline)

3. Comment: in limitations and future direction section, statement that efforts will be made to determine the reliability of at least the 18 common item instrument...
Response: limitations section of the study has been clarified as follows (page 10):

...Similar to test analyses conducted by UCSD EdCom for multiple-choice tests administered in academic courses, a test analysis was conducted for the five knowledge questions (Table 2: questions 6-10). The test analysis showed that these questions had adequate to good discrimination, efficiency, and correlation indices (B. Stanonik, personal communication); however, we would have greater confidence about their validity and reliability had we conducted a formal instrument development procedure.

We also clarified why we did not conduct a formal instrument development procedure in the Methods section, as follows:
Instrument development (page 5):

...Throughout the process of instrument development, the questions were frequently reviewed and critiqued by NTCC members for clarity and face validity; however, formal instrument development procedures were not employed due to time requirements to complete the baseline survey prior to availability of NTCC-developed educational materials.

Please know that we were aware of the limitations inherent in not conducting formal instrument development procedures but did not believe we could spend 12-18 months on this process within the time constraints of the NIH contract. Also, the UCSD EdCom test analysis is for multiple-choice questions only and is not designed to assess responses to Likert-type or other questions, so we were not able to further assess the reliability of other common questions.

Reviewer: A. Harries

General
Comment:...I would have thought the paper would be strengthened by waiting for these data...
Response: We believed it was important to establish a baseline level of knowledge, attitudes, and confidence about tuberculosis in students prior to exposing them to NTCC-developed educational materials. We also believed this information would be useful to educators wishing to improve their curricula now, rather than waiting until the project ends with "After" survey data not available for analysis and comparison until mid-2008, and publication in 2009 at the earliest.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Methods: More details re: how students filled out the questionnaire; reasons for only 8% response from Public Health Discipline
Response: The survey administration section (pages 5-6) has been expanded to address this issue to explain that in almost all cases (except public health) surveys were administered during classroom sessions where students were together for a course. This approach worked well for the clinical disciplines; however, in the three participating public health programs, students were not all together at the same time. Accordingly, MPH students in these schools were invited to participate in the survey on a voluntary basis by individually obtaining a copy of the survey and answer sheet; only 61 students chose to participate in this manner...

We have also emphasized in both the abstract and the results that when the public health discipline respondents are excluded, almost two-thirds (64%) of students in the seven clinically-related disciplines completed surveys.

2. Results - Table 3. ....table does not fit in well into the subject matter...
Response: Table 3 has been deleted. Key points had already been included in results (page 7) and we agree Table 3 is not necessary.

3. Results - Table 4 is unnecessarily complicated.
Response: We agree and have modified Table 4 (now Table 3) into "Agree" and "Disagree" columns. We did leave the 4 point mean column as it is an additional measure of the intensity of the responses (page 17).

4. Results - Table 5. Authors should provide legend.
Response: Column headings now include discipline name and abbreviations

5. Discussion, Page 8. Authors state belief that TB specific information....
Response: With Table 3 deleted the first half of the paragraph in question is no longer pertinent and has been deleted.

Minor Essential Revisions:
Discussion: Page 10, first para, last sentence
Response: Information has been clarified (see response to Reviewer Elfrink's 3. Comment above re: limitations)

Also, the last sentence of the first paragraph of the Discussion section (page 8 of revised version) has also been clarified.

Discretionary Revisions:
1. Reasons for not waiting to submit survey results until "after" was completed were addressed and explained above.

2. Selection of questions used to determine knowledge: The 5 general questions were considered to be knowledge important to all 8 disciplines; additional discipline-specific questions addressed the other issues listed in various versions of the survey. For example, pharmacists will need to know different information about chemotherapy than would an undergraduate nurse; protective measures in health care settings when dealing with a case of tuberculosis will be different for laboratory personnel than for physicians or nurses, and respiratory therapists may have additional requirements for their equipment that would not be important for clinical laboratory scientists to know. Each of the eight disciplines has taken their discipline-specific questions and integrated them into presentations and publications, as appropriate.

Thank you again for these very careful reviews and I hope our responses address the major compulsory and other requested revisions such that the manuscript can be accepted for publication.

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July 9, 2007