Author's response to reviews

Title: Trends in Complementary/Alternative Medicine Use by Breast Cancer Survivors: Comparing Survey Data from 1998 and 2005

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Author’s response to reviews:

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Dear BMC Editor:


Thank you for forwarding the reviewers' comments on our manuscript. Based on their comments and suggestions, we have made the following changes:

Reviewer 1: Paul Shekelle

1. Our definition of CAM has now been explicitly stated in the last paragraph of the introduction and further clarified in the 2nd paragraph of the methods that participants were asked to select which products and therapies they had used from a pre-determined list.

2. The reviewer is correct. Our source excluded skin cancer from the statistical analysis. Thus, we have changed the wording of this sentence to read: "breast cancer is a common malignant neoplasm,..."

3. The first paragraph of the results clarifies the drop of the denominator.

4. The necessary details of the 2005 are included in the methods of this paper. The Zick reference is included should the reader be interested in additional details. The Zick paper is now in press and due to be published in January 2007.

5. As suggested, the predictors analysis has been removed from the paper.

6. Although this paper is not about evidence per se, we felt that it was warranted to discuss whether the changes in use could be explained by the presence (or lack) of scientific evidence.

7. The sentence "There is no reason to believe that the women lost to follow-up for this reason were any different from the women surveyed." has been deleted from the limitations section as requested.

8. The term alternative has been clarified in the conclusion.

Reviewer 2: Lynda Balneaves

1. A discussion of the impact of the difference in the survey date from diagnosis has been added to the limitation section of the paper.

2. Although we generally agree with the need for the development of standardized patient education on CAM, we don't believe that our data justify making this statement. We did not ask patients if they would like/need education on CAM nor investigate whether standardized information is necessary or desirable.

3. Spelling errors corrected (thank you)
4. The question asked what products and therapies were used “for” their breast cancer. The statements on page 6 have been revised to reflect this fact.

5. Thank you, we have cited the Balneaves 2006 paper in the introduction.

6. "Users" has been changed to "consumers" throughout the paper.

7. We agree with the reviewer about the women lost to follow-up and thus the sentence that "There is no reason to believe that the women lost to follow-up for this reason were any different from the women surveyed." has been deleted from the limitations section as requested by reviewer #1.

Reviewer 3: Eileen Rakovitch

1. The sample totals are provided in figure 1. A note to see figure 1 has now been included in the first sentence of the methods to clarify this.

2. There is a lag time between the time of diagnosis and the inclusion of the pathology reports in the Registry. This is now clarified in the limitations section of the paper.

3. As suggested, the characteristics of CAM users vs. nonusers section has been removed from the paper.

4. The Zick paper is now in press and the reference has been changed to reflect this.

5. We have explicitly noted in the limitation section that because of the potential selection bias noted by this reviewer, our results may be an over-estimate of the true prevalence of CAM use.