Author's response to reviews

Title: What Rheumatologists in the United States Think of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Results of a National Survey

Authors:

Nisha J Manek (manek.nisha@mayo.edu)
Cynthia S Crowson (crowson.cynthia@mayo.edu)
Abigale L Ottenberg (ottenberg.abigale@mayo.edu)
Ted J Kaptchuck (Ted_kaptchuck@hms.harvard.edu)
Farr A Curlin (fcurlin@bsd.uchicago.edu)
Jon C Tilburt (tilburt.Jon@mayo.edu)

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Melissa Norton, MD
Editor-in-Chief
BioMed Central Complementary and Alternative Medicine
Middlesex House
34-42 Cleveland Street
London W1T 4LB
UNITED KINGDOM

RE: MS# 1513484365285956 - What Rheumatologists in the United States Think of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Results of a National Survey

We are very pleased to be able to revise our manuscript, “What Rheumatologists in the United States Think of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Results of a National Survey,” for consideration of publication in BioMed Central Complementary and Alternative Medicine. We thank the reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments, which we have addressed as follows:

Editor’s Comments:

1) We have added a statement to the Methods regarding the IRB exempt status of the study.
2) We have added a competing interests statement.

Andre Busato:

1) This national survey of rheumatologists did not include any questions regarding counseling or psychotherapy.
2) The total number of practicing rheumatologists in the United States was estimated to be 4,946 in 2005 to 2006. This has been added to the Methods section under “Participants.”
3) The survey items were developed through focus groups, drafting of an instrument, and cognitive testing, with the categories of the CAM modalities defined from existing current definitions of the National Institutes of Health. This is outlined in the Methods section under “Survey Instrument.”
4) The “familiarity” with the 6 CAM modalities and the “perceptions” are the same items. For simplicity we have omitted the word “familiarity.”
5) The questionnaire asked about perceived benefits and likelihood of recommending each of the 6 CAM modalities. These were the 2 dependent variables and therefore were treated separately in the analyses.
6) We have included the 2 survey questions and their subcomponents in the original form in the Methods section.
7) The score test was used to test the proportional odds assumption. The usual assumptions for these tests were not violated.
8) Univariate and multivariate analysis were performed, but for simplicity we have reported only the multivariate results. The Methods and Tables 2 and 3 have been amended, and we do not mention univariate analysis.

Stefanie Joos:

Overall:
1) The survey questionnaire assessed rheumatologists’ opinions on the use of CAM modalities in the treatment of chronic back pain or joint pain. We have amended the Abstract and the Methods section accordingly.

Introduction/Methods section:
2) We have mentioned the international perspective on physician attitudes to CAM in the Introduction.
3) We acknowledge in the Introduction that primary care physicians as well as rheumatologists care for persons with arthritis.
4) The Berman paper surveyed opinions on 22 individual CAM modalities, and the authors of this paper noted that there is a question of what exactly constitutes CAM therapy. In the years since the Berman study was completed, the NIH has developed major categories for CAM. Also, in our focus groups with physicians leading up to the survey, we found that many thought in broad categories and only occasionally could name really specific and esoteric techniques. Therefore, our survey adapts the NIH CAM categories into 6 groups, which are intuitive for physicians and easier for cross-comparisons.
5) We have removed the univariate analyses.

Results section:
6) Former Table 2 has been reformatted as a diagram (Figure, A and B) for better depiction of the data.
7) The subgroups of “Institutional” and “Other” practice types have been combined for Tables 2 and 3 for ease of reference for the reader.

Discussion:
8) The section has been shortened.
9) The number of rheumatologists in the U.S. is now stated in the Methods section. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are comparable to national data (Results, paragraph 1).
10) The sentence on page 15 has been omitted.

We hope these changes to the manuscript will address the reviewers’ concerns.

With very best wishes,

Nisha Manek, MD