Author's response to reviews

Title: Herbal medicine use among urban residents in Lagos, Nigeria

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Version: 3 Date: 13 November 2011

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RESPONSE TO THE REVIEWS’ COMMENTS

Many thanks for considering our manuscript for publication in your reputable journal, BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicines. We sincerely thank the reviewers for their invaluable suggestions towards making the manuscript better to read.

Given below are our comments to the various queries and suggestions from each of the reviewers:

Reviewer: Behice Erci

Question: Limitations of the work are not clearly stated. It should be added.
Answer: Initially we acknowledge only one limitation. We have added three more limitations stated as “Our data represent one point in time and do reflect changes in patients’ experiences with herbal medicines over time. Although, the demographics of the herbal medicine users in this study were similar to the characteristics of users previously reported [32, 36], our findings may not be necessarily generalizable to other populations in Nigeria.”

Reviewer: Tat-Leang Lee

Question: The study has found that about 20% of the respondents had experienced mild to moderate adverse effects, this should deserve further study.
Answer: Comments have been made about this in the discussion. This is stated as “The proportion of the respondents (20%) who experienced mild to moderate adverse effects is considerable and much lower than the proportion (10.4%) who reported side effects to herbal remedies in the United States [36]. Further studies are therefore necessary in the future to assess the specific potential toxicities associated with different herbal remedies”.

Reviewer: Titilayo Fakeye

Question: Background in the abstract, line 3- lack of evidence ….their use. This is not one of the aim/goals of the study so may not be relevant.
Answer: This section has been deleted.

Question: Space not sufficient between abstract and background of the main text. Need to justify the alignment and the pages
Answer: Suggestions have been implemented

Question: Pages 5, last paragraph. I believe more references are needed about the risk of taking herbal medicines.
Answer: Three more references have been added
**Question:** Part of the ethical consideration should be re-phrased as “... in the study of taken as a consent from them”

**Answer:** Suggestion has been implemented

**Question:** Was the questionnaire translated from English to the native language by a Language specialist? If yes, was the questionnaire and the responses validated by the Language specialist?

**Answer:** Yes, we employed the services of two lecturers from English and Yoruba Language Departments at the University of Lagos for the translation. The questionnaire and the responses from the 20 pre-tested questionnaires were validated before the study proper. However, these details were deliberately not included in the manuscript so as to avert the readers from losing track and also keeping to moderate words limit.

**Question:** Page 12, last paragraph, last sentence may not be accurate. Please check some suggested articles.

**Answer:** We had a second look at the statement and found nothing wrong. We therefore left it unchanged. Please be reminded that our comment was based on comparison with a similar study where herbal and synthetic medicines were predominantly used to treat malaria but not compared with a homogenous population who are predominantly hypertensives (the reference articles).

**Question:** Page 12, 1st paragraph, lines 11-12. The reason may simply be because the studies cited were in selected populations such as pregnant women, hypertensive patients etc, and not the general population, which was eventually pointed out in page 13, last paragraph. This section should be removed.

**Answer:** Suggestion has been implemented and that section deleted

**Question:** Page 14, first paragraph line 5-6. I believe the sentence is better re-phrased as “... preparations may supposedly contain similar.....thus may put the respondents”

**Answer:** Suggestion has been implanted.

**Question:** Please have another look at the tables and make sure they are properly arranged

**Answer:** Tables have been rearranged

**Question:** No definition of what is meant by herbal medicines in the methodology

**Answer:** We have explicitly defined herbal medicines in the introduction according to the World Health Organization (WHO). We also stated categorically in the methods that our definition of herbal medicine was according to the WHO. Asking us to define herbal medicine in the methods would be tantamount to repetition of the definition. The statement about herbal medicine definition was therefore left as it were originally.
**Reviewer:** Chi Wai Lui

**Question:** The definition of ‘African Traditional Medicine’ (P.3 last paragraph) was redundant as it added nothing new to the WHO’s definition of ‘traditional medicine’ which was introduced and elaborated in the previous paragraph.

**Answer:** This section has been deleted

**Question:** P. 5, last three lines: ‘In some cases where herbal medicines WERE USED RATIONALITY, adverse reactions have been reported when used alone [21] or concurrently with conventional or orthodox medicines [22]. What is the meaning of ‘…were used rationally’ and how does it relate to the point under discussion here?

**Answer:** This section has been re-phrased to read “Adverse reactions have been reported to herbal medicines when used alone [24] or concurrently with conventional or orthodox medicines [25]”

**Question:** P.13 first paragraph: ‘Malaria is a common public health problem in Nigeria… Despite good awareness of ACT in Nigeria [33], the respondents preferred to treat malaria with herbal medicine preparations probably because of their awareness that artemisinin antimalarial drugs were of plant origin’. I think the authors had jumped to the conclusion too fast here as there were many assumptions involved. Also it was unclear from where the observation ‘the respondents preferred to treat malaria with herbal medicine preparations probably because of their awareness that artemisinin antimalarial drugs were of plant origin’ was derived. Was it a finding of the current or previous research?

**Answer:** The section referring to the use of artemesinin antimalarial drugs has been deleted.

**Question:** P.15, last 4 lines: considering the magnitude of popularity of herbal medicines among the respondents and their levels of ignorance of the potential toxicities, it is necessary to evaluate the safety, efficacy and quality of these preparations and products which may involve clinical trial studies. In addition to calling for more clinical trial studies, the authors may also examine/elaborate on the need for health education or to provide the general public with information about the safe use of herbal medicine.

**Answer:** The suggestions have been implemented. The use of public enlightenment programme, in the form health education, has been discussed.

**Question:** the authors had confined the discussion/comparison of research findings to the context of Nigeria. Reference to and comparison with international studies on CAM use in general population will help broaden the scope of the paper.

**Answer:** The results have been further discussed and compared with other studies done in Finland and the United States.