Author’s response to reviews

Title: The prevalence and experience of Australian naturopaths and Western herbalists working within community pharmacies

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor

We appreciate the time and effort the four reviewers have put in to reviewing our manuscript entitled ‘The prevalence and experience of Australian naturopaths and Western herbalists working within community pharmacies’

As requested, we have listed reviewer suggestions and our responses. (See below)

We trust this will be sufficient and meet your needs.

Thank you for supplying these useful reviewer comments

Dr Lesley Braun (on behalf of the author team)

**Responses to reviewer’s comments**

As there were 4 reviewers, we have briefly listed their suggestions and our responses, point-by-point.

1. **comments by Tat-Leang lee**

   - *Authors may consider including the questionnaire as an appendix.*

   This has been submitted however we have not reported all the results in this manuscript so is not appropriate to publish the questionnaire.

   - *One small typo error - 2nd paragraph under introduction: delete an extra full stop following the 1st sentence.*

     This has been changed accordingly.

2. **comments by Kristine A. Hirschkorn**

   - *I would suggest a refinement be made to the secondary aim: “Secondary aims were to explore the attitudes of the broader naturopathic and WHM profession to integration of naturopaths and WHM practitioners within the pharmacy setting.”*
Good suggestion. This has been changed accordingly.

- **1- [Minor Essential Revision]** It would be more appropriate to write that the aim was to explore the attitudes of individual practitioners from the broader “naturopathic and Western medicine profession” than to explore the attitudes of the profession writ large (unless some official profession-level position statements were sought from professional representatives). This comment also relates to a suggested revision under point 10 below.

Good suggestion. This has been changed accordingly.

- **B. Are the methods appropriate and well described?** Yes, however I would make the following suggestion: **2- [Discretionary Revision]** that a note be made with respect to why the sample does not include complementary practitioners other than naturopaths and WHM practitioners, e.g., homeopaths, practitioners of other herbal systems. Are they not (known to be) practicing in pharmacies? And/or is the intent to focus only on Western herbal product sales and related consultations taking place in pharmacies, rather than on other types of products and “complementary medicines” and “complementary practitioners” writ large?

The main aim of the study was to explore only naturopaths and herbalists as these are the main practitioners seen to be practising in these locations. It also allowed some exploration of possible safety issues relating to medicinal agents.

- **3- [Major Compulsory Revisions]** Data table 1, p. 5: There appears to be a discrepancy under the “years spent working as a naturopath and/or WHM practitioner” characteristic/variable. There is also an apparent inconsistency under the “Current main place of practice” characteristic/variable. Finally, it would be worth confirming that the percentages throughout the table are calculated correctly. While there may be some rounding error, there are several examples of the calculated percentage being off by 1% and in one case 2%, which leads to the total percentages adding up to 101, 103%, etc. for some variables.

This has been rechecked and adjusted accordingly. As the reviewer pointed out, rounding errors contributed to most of the differences.

- **4- [Major Compulsory Revision]** Data table 2, p. 7: the percentages appear to be identical to the numbers (N) reported, despite the fact that the number of respondents who report working in a pharmacy is 111 (not 100) - can the authors please confirm whether the percentages were calculated correctly?

This has been rechecked, clarified and corrected accordingly.

- **5- [Major Compulsory Revision]** Data table 3, p. 8: there is an apparent discrepancy between the totals reported for the “hours/week” variable (N = 99) and the “wage” variable (N = 89
This is a good point and the issue of respondents has been clarified in the manuscript.

- **6- [Minor Essential Revision]** Data table 3, p. 8: I would suggest applying consistent formatting to this table (per the others in the paper).

Authors could not see any major differences in formatting, as the reviewer has suggested.

- **7- [Discretionary Revision]** The authors frame the study as exploratory, I wonder why a qualitative methodology was not chosen, as a first approach? Ultimately, I think there is validity to their choice of method, I would simply like to see some explanation for why they chose a questionnaire in light of the sampling limitation and study objective, relative to the state of knowledge about the subject.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, we felt a national survey would provide a good starting place which could then be followed by more in depth interviews at a later date.

- **8- [Discretionary Revision]** No limitations are reported with respect to the utilization of an online survey format and no explanation is provided for why an online survey was chosen over a paper and pencil version. Relatedly, no rationale is provided for the choice of Survey Monkey software...

Since no contact list was available to researchers, we did not have postal addresses to send paper based versions of the survey out to possible practitioners. We were also assured by our advisory group and the National Herbalists Association of Australia that an online survey would be an appropriate method and provide easier access for practitioners. The survey monkey software had been used before by the research group and found to be reliable and easy for participants to use. The chief statistician also suggested this was a good platform and would reliably capture the required data.

- Is the writing acceptable? The article is well-written in clear, concise language. Note the following: **9- [Minor Essential Revision]** P. 3 Introduction, paragraph 2- first sentence is followed by two periods “.”

This has been corrected.

- **10- [Minor Essential Revision]** P. 10, second paragraph, first line: “The broader naturopathic and Western herbal medicine professions hold concerns about…” Since individuals, not professional association representatives per se, were surveyed, it would be more appropriate to rephrase as follows (or something similar, per my earlier comments under point 1 above): “Practitioners from the broader naturopathic and Western medicine profession who were surveyed…” or “The broader naturopathic and Western herbal medicine professionals… ”
Good suggestion. This has been changed accordingly.

3. Comments by Yuri Clement

- **MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS: Methods;** The authors could include selected items of the survey instrument in this section, especially attitudinal questions. Examples of multiple choice questions (are these knowledge based?), open-ended and items requiring Likert-scale responses could also be given.

We were concerned about keeping within the manuscript the word count so did not think this was essential. Instead of reprinting actual attitudinal statements, we have provided relevant information in the way the results were presented. For example, the section entitled Information exchange between pharmacists and practitioners’ directly reports results which were collected using multiple choice responses.

- **Discussion** This section is generally well written. However, the authors should temper their discussion to reflect the serious limitations of the survey, primarily the self-selection bias of respondents...

The results and comments derived from the non-pharmacy participants add weight to the overall results regarding integration but as the reviewer points out, will not reflect non-participants. This has been addressed in the limitations section of the manuscript.

4. Comments by Anthony Zhang

- **Major Compulsory Revisions**

  - **Abstract:** Please provide the geographic location of the survey being conducted. Were the survey participants recruited from all states/territories in Australia? Please make reference to the representation of the survey participants to the national/state profile (even to some extent that the data allows).

The online survey was available nationally and offered to practitioners around the entire country. This has been clarified in the manuscript. Data about practitioner location was not collected as it did not appear relevant to the main aim of the study, although this was a good suggestion for future studies and has been clarified in the manuscript.

- **Introduction:** As rightly pointed out by the authors, little is known about the prevalence of naturopaths and WHM practitioners working in the pharmacy setting. Unfortunately, results presented in the current paper do not provide details on this matter. Please make references to existing data on naturopaths and WHM practitioners workforce data in Australia, e.g. studies published by Bensoussan et al (2004) in Complement Ther Med and Lin et al (2009) in Risk Management and Healthcare Policy and give details on what new data were collected through the current survey.
The results in the relevant Bensoussan paper which was included in the Lin et al (2009) paper have been referenced in the manuscript. This exploratory study has begun to identify the prevalence of naturopaths that had worked in pharmacies and provided a starting point for further research which can explore this further. The interface developing between pharmacist and naturopaths and naturopaths experiences in this environment have not been explored to this depth in previous publications. As suggested, further research is required.

- **Method:** How many emails/letters were sent to the practitioners in the mailing list and those identified through websites? …

Researchers did not have access to email lists and did not send reminder emails to prospective participants. National professional associations and major product manufacturers encouraged participation through their newsletters and journals before the study commenced and during the data collection period. It is impossible to accurately determine how many practitioners may have received information about the survey or how times a practitioner may have been contacted using this method or how many practitioners were contacted.

- **Minor Essential Revisions**
  - **Abstract:** How many naturopaths and western herbalists were invited to participate in the survey?

This has been addressed above.

- **Line 11, please be more specific what is “…this was generally described as a positive learning experience…”**. The conclusions can be further elaborated in terms of what are the identified issues for the integration of naturopathy and WHM in the pharmacy setting.

The ‘positive learning experience’ stated in the abstract is discussed in more detail in the full length manuscript.

- **Introduction:** What are “solidly orthodox methods…” (line 4)?

Regarding the query about the use of the term ‘solidly orthodox methods’ this is reported as a direct quote with reference provided.

- **Method:** Data analysis section indicated means +/- standard errors, Wilcoxon Rank Sum tests and IQR. These have not been reflected in the result section?

These methods were applied to some specific sections of the study which were not reported in the final manuscript.
• **Results:** Most respondents were female, it would be helpful to compare this to the existing workforce data (see comments above).

This was mentioned in the manuscript as being comparable to a workforce survey. Gender comparisons to other surveys were considered and reported as similar in the manuscript.

• **Information exchange between pharmacists and practitioners is of special interest as discussed in the Discussion section. Subgroup analysis would be useful.**

This would be good for future research with larger numbers to be more meaningful.

• **Discussion:** Page 10 paragraphs 2-3 are not relevant, in particular, para 3 “…it can be assumed they…”.

The relevance of paragraphs 2 and 3 in the discussion section were considered relevant by the other 3 reviewers so have remained.

• **Page 10, first heading should read “financial considerations for naturopaths [and WHM practitioners]”**.

This has been addressed

• **Page 11 para 1, please elaborate what are “…several problems and concerns from the complementary medicine perspective…”**.

This has been addressed

• **Conclusion:** It is not clear what are “several practical and philosophical issues need to be resolved”.

This has been clarified in the text.

• **References:**
Formatting issues relate to the reference manager software used. We are uncertain whether changing the formatting will compromise the efforts of the editorial team to apply the journals own formatting, so have elected to leave it as is.