Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Kristine A. Hirschkorn

Reviewer's report:

A. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

Yes, with respect to the primary aim: “The primary aims of this survey were to identify the prevalence, roles and experience of naturopaths and WHM [Western herbal medicine] practitioners working within the pharmacy setting.”

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”.

• 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.

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?

C. Are the data sound?

Inclusion of direct quotations (including the number of free-text comments received) provide confidence in the results and conclusions reported. With respect to the data tables, the following revisions/corrections are requested, although these revisions do not alter the substance of the conclusions drawn in the paper:

• 3- [Major Compulsory Revisions] Data table 1, p. 5:

  o There appears to be a discrepancy under the “years spent working as a naturopath and/or WHM practitioner” characteristic/variable. Specifically, the number across categories of the variable adds up to 579, but the total number of
respondents reported for the survey is 479. I suspect that the “1-4” category contains an error and should only be n=145 (instead of n=245).

- There is also an apparent inconsistency under the “Current main place of practice” characteristic/variable, in that the total number across the variable adds up to 538 (rather than the sample size of N=479), and the corresponding percentage adds up to %116.

- 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.

- 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?

- 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), given that the number of survey respondents who reported working in a pharmacy is 111. To account for the difference, could the authors include a category for “not reported”, if relevant (per the other tables), or indicate whether table 3 reports only on a sub-set of respondents who work in pharmacies?

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

D. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes.

E. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes, clear links are made between the results reported, existing literature in the area, and conclusions made.

F. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Overall, yes. The notable limitation is that a convenience sample was used, as the real population is not known/knowable. This is, however, addressed in the methods section.

There are, however, two areas where further explanation could be provided:

- 7- [Discretionary Revision] The authors frame the study as exploratory, i.e. in their words, “little is known about the prevalence of naturopaths and WHM working in the pharmacy setting, the types of services provided, etc…”. In light of this, and the fact that the population of naturopaths and WHM is unknown, I
wonder why a qualitative methodology was not chosen, e.g., semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample, etc. 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.

• 8- [Discretionary Revision] No limitations are reported with respect to the utilization of an on-line survey format and no explanation is provided for why an on-line survey was chosen over a paper and pencil version, i.e., why was the on-line version deemed most appropriate for this population and for the study objectives? Relatedly, no rationale is provided for the choice of Survey Monkey software, and no potential limitations of the software identified, i.e., to what extent does Survey Monkey correspond to the known/best standards that exist for on-line survey data collection, e.g., with respect to control over data quality (related to data entry errors, skip patterns and routing through the survey instrument, etc.) and respondent-break offs (related to the quality of the user-interface / usability)? Specifically, I would suggest briefly describing the rationale for using (1) an on-line survey tool; (2) that particular software package; and (3) what the potential advantages and/or limitations may be for doing so.

G. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes.

H. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes.

I. 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 “.”
• 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...”

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.