Author's response to reviews

Title: The role of natural health products (NHPs) in dietetic practice: Results from a survey of Canadian dietitians

Authors:

Kristine Hirschkorn (kristine@hirschkorn.net)
Rishma Walji (waljir@mcmaster.ca)
Heather S Boon (heather.boon@utoronto.ca)

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Author's response to reviews:

RE: Response to Reviewers (MS: 1845400730893635 / The role of natural health products (NHPs) in dietetic practice: Results from a survey of Canadian dietitians

Many thanks to the reviewers for their thoughtful comments, and help in improving the manuscript. Our response is provided in bulleted text after each suggested revision.

Reviewer's report #1 (Annette Dickinson)

Discretionary revisions:
1. The term "dietary supplements" is sometimes used in the text to refer to some of the products, and this term should probably be included among the Key Words.
   • “Dietary supplements” was added to the Key Words.
   • Also, for greater clarity, we elected to provide a definition for “dietary supplements” in the text of the manuscript, along with a reference to the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994. Refer to the second paragraph of page 4, where the following line is included: “One notable exception is the set of guidelines published by the American Dietetics Association [14, 15] that were developed in response to the increasing expectation that dietitians provide recommendations with respect to dietary supplements, the U.S. regulatory category that includes nutritional supplements and herbal products [16].

2. Reference 2 is for a 1996 position paper on vitamins and minerals, which I believe has been superseded by a 2009 position paper on nutrient supplementation, JADA 2009; 109(12)2073-85. Also, note that the American Dietetic Association has recently adopted the name Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, which may not be relevant when discussing previous position statements.
• The reference, along with the quotation in the text of the manuscript (paragraph 2 of the background section) have been updated to reflect the newer position paper.
• The name change has also been referred to in the second paragraph of the Background section, per the following "According to the former American Dietetic Association (now the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics)". The former name is maintained throughout, however, due to the use of references published under that name.

3. Paragraph 6 of the Background section cites reference 7 regarding the questions received by dietitians about vitamins/minerals and herbal products "in the past five years," but the reference for this was published in 2001, so the reference is not to the most recent past five years.
• This has been clarified by the following wording: “in the five years preceding the study.”

4. The next paragraph starts with a reference to "one notable exception" but cites two references, not one. The intended reference appears to be 14 rather than 15, since the page citation is from reference 14.
• This has been corrected - now the passage only lists one reference (formerly #14, currently #17 due to the addition of references in response to the other reviewer’s comments).

5. The next-to-last paragraph in the Background section, and the paragraph before it, both end with "etc," which I believe is weak and would be best avoided.
• ‘Etc.’ has been removed from these passages.

6. Also, in the next-to-last paragraph, there is a mis-spelling (neutraceuticals).
• The mis-spelling has been corrected.

7. Paragraph 3 of the Methods section says the survey addressed perceptions with regard to "dietary supplements." Would it not be more consistent to refer to Natural Health Products here? The paragraph ends with another mention of "dietary supplements" instead of Natural Health Products. Dietary supplements is the U.S. regulatory category that covers nutritional supplements and herbal products (but not functional foods). The term also appears a couple of other times in the manuscript and perhaps should be replaced by Natural Health Products.
• Note that each reference to ‘dietary supplements’ was changed to ‘NHPs’ throughout the manuscript, with the exception of the instances where the U.S. regulatory category is referred to.
8. In the Results section under Response Rate, the authors say the primary employment setting by far is hospitals. Then they refer to other primary employment settings "with larger numbers of RDs," which is confusing, since these other settings are evidently not as large as the hospital setting. Perhaps they mean to refer to other settings with "substantial" numbers of RDs.
   • Correct: “larger” has been changed to “substantial”.

9. In the section on Views About Inclusion of NHPs in Dietetic Scope of Practice, in the middle of the first paragraph there is a missing word ("of"). The sentence should say "specifically, 74% (381) of RDs report........"
   • This has been corrected.

10. Also, the word "report" in this sentence might be replaced with "believe," even if that means using the term twice in close proximity.
   • Done.

11. In the third paragraph in this section, after the subhead "personal consumption", the word "ingesting" should start with a capital I.
   • This has been corrected.

11. In the paragraph just before "Limitations," the authors say RDs who provide counselling "are 0.5 times less likely to believe......” Perhaps it would be more clear to say that they are "only half as likely to believe........"
   • Done.

12. There are a lot of figures. Are they all essential, or could some be removed or combined?
   • Figures 1 to 3 were removed, as the data are relatively simple to interpret in narrative format. The others were kept, as they facilitate the discernment of patterns and comparisons in the data.

Minor essential revisions:

13. The authors are inquiring about the appropriate scope of practice for dietitians relating to Natural Health Products, which they define to include nutritional supplements, functional foods/nutraceuticals, and herbal preparations. These are logical categories for consideration by dietitians, but (as noted in the text) they are not exactly the categories defined by Health Canada as Natural Health Products. I think a little more clarity is needed on this point, as illustrated below. In the third paragraph of the Background section, the authors say that until 2004
"only two categories of products were available for sale in Canada." This is an overstatement, since there are obviously many different categories of a wide variety of products for sale in Canada. They describe NHPs as a third category, but in fact NHPs are a subcategory of drugs. Building on their prior discussion of functional foods and nutraceuticals, it would be more accurate to say something like: "Functional foods and nutraceuticals are typically regulated as foods under Canada’s Food and Drugs Act, while some related products including nutritional supplements and herbal products have traditionally been regulated as drugs in Canada under the same Act. Within the drug category, a special subset called Natural Health Products has been recognized in Canadian legislation since January 1, 2004."

- The wording has been changed to improve clarity. Note, however, our emphasis that the three product categories studied (NS, FF/N and HP) currently fall under the definition of NHP and hence the NHP regulations.

Major compulsory revisions: none

Reviewer’s Report #2 (Nancy Wellman)

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Abstract: Include data in Results (and Conclusions) sections; too vague as written.
   - Data were added to the Results section of the Abstract.

2. Introduction and/or Conclusions: To strengthen your advocacy for RDs roles and responsibilities re NHPs, include that some national dietary guidelines recommend the use of dietary supplements for specific population groups, eg, Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2012: folic acid for women capable of becoming pregnant, B12 for those age 50 years and older, etc. I am not as familiar with Canadian and other guidelines, but they likely include such recommendations too.
   - Two references to American and Canadian guidelines (#s 2, 3) are discussed in the 2nd paragraph of the Background section, and linked to RDs’ roles.

3. Comment needed earlier in the narrative on the relatively low (20%) response rate. Limitations could include an assumption that the survey topic may have been too uncomfortable for those with minimal or no knowledge of NHPs. Thus, that contributed to the low response rate.
   - The response rate is noted at the beginning of the results and addressed in
detail as a limitation. Since it is a result of our study and not part of the methods, it is provided as early as possible in the description of our findings. It is also the first limitation discussed in the limitations section.

- Note the addition of the following sentence at the end of paragraph two of the Limitations section: “Although knowledge was not assessed in the follow-up survey, it is also possible that RDs with minimal or no knowledge of NHPs may not have felt comfortable responding to the survey, thus contributing to the low response rate.

4. Limitations: Expand on the secondary follow-up survey results.

- Further results are provided at the end of the second paragraph of the Limitations section, per the following: “There were no significant differences between RDs responding to the full survey and those responding to the secondary follow-up survey with respect to primary practice setting, size of community where practicing, age, years in practice, and involvement in counselling or health promotion.”


- The reference has been included as #5 and is discussed in the second paragraph of the Background section. Other reference numbers have been adjusted accordingly.


- This reference has been updated.

7. Refs #5 & #10 are identical. Use a single citation per author guidelines.

- Reference #10 has been removed, and the reference numbers adjusted accordingly.

Minor Essential Revisions

8. Please correct the name, American Dietetic (no s) Association throughout. Also

ADA changed its name to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics last yr.

- This has been corrected. The name change has also been referred to in the second paragraph of the Background section, per the following “According to the former American Dietetic Association (now the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics)”. The former name is maintained, however, due to the use of references published under that name.

9. Methods: Check verb tense in Methods and throughout the narrative.
• Done – note, for example, the following corrections in the Methods section: “The first section included demographic questions relating to the age, gender, educational background, and practice characteristics of each dietitian. The second section comprised questions...”. Similar corrections (i.e., the consistent utilization of the past tense) were made throughout the narrative.

10. Also check capitalizations for the three NHPs groups throughout.
• This was reviewed – lower case was used for the words (e.g., herbal preparations), except in table headings, and upper case was used for the acronyms (e.g., HP).

11. Was the survey changed after pre-testing?
• This has been noted in the first paragraph of the Methods section: “Following pre-testing, minor modifications were made, including correction of spelling errors, change of question order, change of some response categories and deletion of some questions.”

12. Edit to reduce redundancy in text and tables/figures.
• Figures 1 to 3 were removed, as the data are relatively simple to interpret in narrative format, thereby reducing redundancy.
• Figures 1 and 2 display three categories of responses (never, less than or equal to monthly, greater than monthly), whereas the percentages that are reported in the text are collapsed into two categories, and highlight a higher-level result. Therefore, no changes were made.
• Also, no changes were made to the text that describes figure 3, since the percentages and numbers for the ‘yes’ categories are reported to provide the reader with the complete data for what is, arguably, the central question in this study. A separate presentation of percentages for the “don’t know/unsure” categories was maintained in the text to highlight another key conclusion of the study.

Discretionary Revisions

13. Conclusions: Explain the sentence “This is warranted, even taking into consideration the potentially overlapping roles of other health care providers in this area.”
• This sentence has been reworded as follows, to improve clarity: “Notwithstanding the potentially overlapping roles of other health care providers in this area, RDs need to articulate their particular role.”

14. Abbreviations: put in alphabetical order
• Done.

15. Tables and Figures: Bar graph figures could be combined into 1 table with the actual percentages.
As noted above under point 12, figures 1 to 3 were removed. The other figures were kept as is, since they facilitate the discernment of patterns and comparisons in the data, of which there are multiple, across product categories and questions (e.g., ‘is included in scope’ vs. ‘should be included in scope’).

16. Needs some language corrections before being published

• The paper has been copy-edited again.