Reviewer's report

Title: Epidemiology of traditional herbal medicine use amongst hypertensive patients living in South Africa

Version: 1 Date: 6 June 2012

Reviewer: Kathryn King

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Why was this study considered a pilot study?

2. The purpose of this study was to examine prevalence of THM use for hypertension. The authors first studied a small sample of people to ask about THM use, then drew conclusions based on those who used THM for hypertension. This was not appropriate as the denominator was all people surveyed. No person would take THM for hypertension if they were not hypertensive. Thus, the first step should have been to identify hypertensive patients and the second step to ask how many of them took THM. Finally, the study sample was very small. These are very major problems in the study design and have severely affected the validity of the findings/conclusions.

Minor Essential Revisions

Pg 2, Abstract

Background. I do not think it is necessary to define hypertension in the abstract. I would remove the sentence ‘Traditional herbal medicines (THM) are used in the treatment and management of various ailments.’ as well as the beginning of the next sentence ‘Several reports exists on the high prevalence of’ and replace them with ‘Traditional herbal medicines (THM) are used for the management of hypertension but the prevalence of its use among hypertensive patients….’. Finally, I would delete the last sentence of this section.

Methods. More detail is needed in the methods section. How were the participants chosen? What were the questionnaires? Were they mailed or completed with the help of an assistant?

Findings. What were the demographic characteristics of the study sample? Was there any issues regarding response rate? Usually readers of a ‘prevalence study’ will want to see the statics here.

Conclusions. The conclusions do not seem to ‘fit’ with the data in the Findings section. There is no mention of the rationale for THM use in the findings section, yet it is referred to here.

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Pg 3, Paragraph 1. Please re-word the sentence located on lines 5-8, beginning with ‘Hypertension is one of the chronic…’. As it is currently worded, it appears that renal disease and blindness are part of cardiovascular diseases. I do not
think it is necessary to identify the acronym CDL as it is not used again.

Pg 3, Paragraph 3. I am not sure whose study is referred to in the sentence on lines 3-4.

Pg 4, Paragraph 2. The authors refer to resperine as a conventional drug used for the treatment of hypertension. It is best to use the generic name (which will be trademarked) or the category of drug.

Pg 4, Paragraph 3. The sentence on lines 5-6 should be ‘However, very few publications exist about the prevalence of THM use for hypertension’.

Pg 5, Paragraph 1. The sentences on lines 6-8 should be ‘Conclusions from the study by Peltzer et al. recognized…In the current study, we aimed to determine…’

Pg 5, Paragraph 2. Please explain more about the ‘comparative factors’. What are they? Why were they done?

Pg 6, Paragraph 1. The sentences on lines 5-7 should be ‘Household’s eligibility was based on the criteria that at least one member was between the age of 35 and 70 years, and that person intended to continue living in the current home for the next four years.’

Pg 6, Paragraph 2. How were the 443 participants identified? Though the initial sample of 2000 participants may have been a representative sample (and this is not clear), it is not at all clear that this sub-set of participants is representative.

Pg 6, Paragraph 3. This section should begin with ‘Data were collected about the respondents’ demographic characteristics’. The term ‘sex’ should be used and not the term ‘gender’. The authors refer to male/female in the tables and not men/women. Was any inter-rater reliability measured? This is an important step in assuring good data quality.

Pg 7, Paragraph 1. ‘Given that this was a pilot study…’. This section should be re-written. I would suggest starting with ‘Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies and percentages) were used to characterize the study sample and responses to the questionnaire. Chi-Square was used when making comparisons between groups.’

Pg 7, Paragraph 2. Why was religion of interest?

Pgs 7-9. Results. On the whole, I found this section was quite repetitive and the data seemed ‘over-analyzed’. The comparisons are not appropriate, given the error in determining the denominator.

Pg 10. Paragraph 3. This was a prevalence study. To identify that this study is not generalizable to the broader population is very problematic.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have not competing interests.