Author's response to reviews

Title: A Systematic Review of How Homeopathy is represented in Conventional and CAM Peer Reviewed Journals

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

We would like to thank both of the reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

The first reviewer, Schmidt, has provided a number of suggestions for revisions, all of which are discretionary. We have adopted all of them. For example, we have changed the title of the paper calling it a "systematic review." A number of the comments, such as discretionary revision number 5, seem to be mere (thoughtful) observations and do not require and editorial response (though we agree).

The second reviewer's comments are a bit more difficult to interpret. We greatly appreciate the enthusiastic analysis but feel that some of the comments lack focus. As such, it is difficult to know how to respond. That said, we provide the following comments in reply to the more pointed criticisms.

Marusic's fourth point is that our data does not suggest a bias and that we should suggest that there is a bias in the CAM journals. In fact, we do suggest this ("That said, publication bias - that is, a journal favoring the publication of positive or negative results - is only one possible explanation of this apparent trend."). We do not limit our definition of bias to negative results in conventional journals. However, we have added the following phrase to the discussion in order to clarify the point: "Though there is some evidence of a possible bias in the publication of clinical trials (toward the negative in the conventional journals and toward the positive in the CAM journals)"

Also, it should not be forgotten that there is ample evidence that publication bias does exist in peer-reviewed journals in other contexts (as noted in our AMA reference). Representations of science are clearly not just the objective reporting of "reason" and the "laws of chemistry," as implied by the reviewer. There are numerous socio-political and economic forces at play. This paper is meant to be a small step toward exploring bias (which has been suggested by others) in the area of CAM.

In response to his fifth point, we agree that it is unusual to attempt to "strike a balance" despite a negative result. That is why we note that editors are "striving to explore this controversial area in a relatively impartial manner." We are not saying that we agree that this is the appropriate approach (indeed, we have sympathy with this reviewer's apparent skepticism toward homeopathy). Rather, we are simply seeking to describe the way in which the research is represented.

We also agree that it would be a good idea to explore the quality of the peer review and selection process. This is a noted limitation of our research. However, as noted in the paper, without access to the relevant documentation, this will be difficult to do. Nevertheless, we are now considering methodologies for future work that will consider these issues.

Yours truly,

Timothy Caulfield