Reviewer’s report

Title: Changes in Use of Herbs and Dietary Supplements (HDS) Among Healthcare Professionals Enrolled in an Online Curriculum

Version: 1 Date: 19 November 2006

Reviewer: Yuri Clement

Reviewer’s report:

General
This paper is a prospective study measuring the effect of educational intervention on herb and dietary supplement (HDS) use among healthcare professionals over the winter-spring period. Although there is a statistically significant decrease in HDS use, it is actually small, and is largely attributed to decline in seasonal HDS used for prophylaxis or treatment of cold/flu. Educational intervention, however, did not affect the healthcare professionals’ confidence or communication practices.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. More details of the nature and content of the on-line course needed.

2. Did the course provide evidence-based information on HDS that may directly influence use or affect confidence and communication practices with patients?

3. The authors should include details of questions used to assess participants’ confidence and communication practices and the scales used to rate these parameters, probably as an appendix.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

4. Consistency needed with the terms clinicians and health care professionals throughout manuscript.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

5. Although there was a statistically significant decrease in the number of HDS used pre- and post-educational invention, the authors acknowledge that this change was small. As the authors indicate this number is affected primarily by changes in pattern of use of seasonal HDS. It would be interesting to see whether this moderate effect remains within the same season. As the authors highlighted, a major limitation of the study was that participants were highly self-selected and the results suggest the old adage ‘preaching to the converted’.

6. Although the authors showed that high knowledge scores translated to high baseline HDS use and higher post-course knowledge scores, this intervention increase in knowledge did not translate to further increase in HDS use over the study time frame. Could the authors suggest why this may be happening? Is it that these self-selected clinicians are already confident in HDS use prior to educational intervention (probably supported by previous knowledge)? This may explain the observation of no significant changes in post-course HDS use?

7. In the discussion the authors stated that they did not collect personal health data, but earlier suggested that their sample may be healthier than the general population. Maybe the earlier comment on comparative health status could be adjusted.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests