Author's response to reviews

Title: Clinically relevant safety issues associated with St. John’s wort product labels

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Response of the authors to comments by the reviewers and editor(s)

Title: Clinically relevant safety issues associated with St. John’s wort product labels (Manuscript ID 2050231122188761)

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Dr. Puebla,

We are providing a revised copy of the manuscript, “Clinically relevant safety issues associated with St. John’s wart product labels” (Manuscript ID 2050231122188761), which has integrated the requests of the reviewers as indicated. We are also including a point-by-point response to the reviewers’ comments in which their comments are in italics followed by our responses.

Also, while we understand that your initial determination was that the submitted figures may not be necessary, we feel very strongly that they are a useful addition to our manuscript and need to be kept for two main reasons: 1) there is evidence that visual learners (in particular) can benefit from reinforcement by images and photos via increased comprehension and retention, and 2) one of the benefits of an OA journal (and one which BMC specifically promotes) is the ability to capitalize on the format to include supplemental materials with articles.

Having published dozens of articles in peer-reviewed journals, we understand the convention that does not allow for duplicate publication (i.e. content that appears in text to be reproduced in its entirety in a Table). However, we believe that the images in the Figures we submitted are additive, not repetitive. Additionally, they add to the aesthetic appeal. Whether it is a poster presentation at a scientific conference or a journal article (in which it is traditionally thought of in terms of layout and white space), a more visually appealing presentation of data is more likely to be read and possibly even understood.

Therefore we strongly urge you to reconsider your initial assessment and incorporate the Figures with our manuscript. We appreciate your consideration and coordination thus far and look forward to your decision on our manuscript.

Sincerely,

Kevin A. Clauson, Pharm.D.
(Manuscript ID 2050231122188761) point-by-point response

Reviewer (KL)

This is a simple but interesting study on safety information for St John's wort products on the US market. I have no major comments.
We appreciate the positive words about our efforts.

A minor comment: It would have been nice if the authors would also have checked dosage recommendations and information on the extract. As some products (at least on the European market) contain only low amounts of active ingredients efficacy might be compromised, but also safety concerns might be less relevant.
We actually considered this initially, but elected not to due to concern that including this type of information, in addition to the label criteria that was collected, might divide the focus of what we were trying to convey. Having said that, if this is something the reviewer/editor feels strongly about, we can entertain the request and do our best to comply.

Reviewer (RL)

1. My major point is a very general one: as far as I understood the paper there was one single score (ranging from 0 to 8) for each of the 74 SJW drugs. Thus, there is no need to compare two drugs by means of statistical analysis: two scores are either different, or they are not. There is no uncertainty in the data. I thus believe that reporting simple scores is enough, there is no statistics needed.
Unfortunately, the individual we consulted with who selected the tests and performed the statistical analysis (and who was credited in the acknowledgements) is out of the country, unreachable, and appears to be so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, in respect to the requested resubmission timeframe, we consulted with a different statistician. The new statistician’s initial comments actually echoed yours in that his conclusion was that statistical tests were unnecessary for this data. His impression was that the previous analysis that was done identified each of the 8 criteria as separate Y/N (i.e. nominal) data, which is flawed since the observations were not independent of one another. He similarly gave two recommendations like yours – and his strongly preferred one was that the statistical tests, p values, etc. be removed and the results are just presented in simple, descriptive terms.

In lieu of addressing the various tests below you mentioned as a second possibility (if your understanding of the scoring was flawed), we agree with your initial major point. Thus, we have removed the statistical analysis and surrounding language, calculations, etc.
2. In case I did not understand fully how the products were scored and there indeed are multiple ratings for each product, the statistical methods need some revision:

a. This paper analyses numbers ranging from 0 to 8, which clearly is an ordinal scale, but not a continuous nor a nominal scale. Consequently, neither ANCOVA models (which fit normally distributed data) nor chi-square tests (which are useful for nominally distributed data) are appropriate to analyse the data. I recommend to use either Kruskal-Wallis tests or to fit Poisson-models to the data.

Please refer to the above comments in regards to your second item, as we have acquiesced to your initial major point.

Although this article is of no interest for an European like me, I recommend to accept the paper after the above mentioned points of criticism have been considered.

We sincerely appreciate the time you spent in reviewing our manuscript and in helping identify and correct a fundamental flaw. While we did originally consult with someone experienced in statistics/experimental design, we do recognize that it is our submission and more specifically that I (KAC) am ultimately responsible for all aspects of this article – including this mistake. Again, we appreciate your intervention, which has prevented possible publication in an erroneous form.