Author's response to reviews

Title: Identification of core competencies for primary care of allergy patients using a modified Delphi technique

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Dear Editors,

Thank you for your review of this study and for valuable comments. I have tried to improve this paper and changed it according to your suggestions. The changes are listed below. The paper has also been checked by a native translator. Now, I hope you will be willing to publish this study in the BMC Medical Education.

Looking forward to hearing from you

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Referee 1. The changes are highlighted in yellow in the manuscript.
1. Comment on guidelines in primary care has been included on p 3 line 10, 16-17. The results are also commented in discussion p11, line 6-8.
2. A table (Table 1) showing the profession of participants in the three rounds is shown on page 15. Six primary care physicians and one nurse of total of fifteen “experts “ participated in listing of the skills.

Cathegory of expert Invitees Round 1 Responents Round 2 Responents Round 3
Prim care physician 5 12 14
Prim care nurse 1 5 5
Secondary care physician 9

3. Although all participants were encouraged to suggest additional competencies in all rounds, no additional skills were generated by the second and third round, resp.
4. Corrections are made in the legends of Tables 2 and 3, the word competency has been replaced by knowledge and training.

5. Background. Agreement has been added.

6. Discussion. Nine of the participants were secondary clinicians- 6 were primary clinicians which is stated now.

7. Discussion. Explanation according to the 75% agreement is offered.

8. The specialists chosen are in addition often lecturers at national training programmes in asthma and allergy, p 5, line 6-7. We obtained names of participants from 12 regions only, the geographically largest regions of Sweden are included.

Referee 2. The changes are highlighted in green in the manuscript.

1. General issues. The choice of Delphi method for unrevealing practice gaps to develop a post-graduate training programme is commented in the Background. The pitfalls of brainstorming or nominal group technique are mentioned (p 3 line 11-15, 18-28).

2. Abstract. Another conclusion has been chosen:“Core competencies for good practice amongst primary care providers may constitute a reference for primary care of allergy patients and can be used for accreditation of primary care units”.

3. Background. The choice of Delphi method for unrevealing practice gaps to develop a post-graduate training programme is commented. The pitfalls of brainstorming or nominal group technique are mentioned (p 3 line 18-28).

4. Methods. This study employs a modified Delphi methodology, keeping the core principle of elucidating most important issues by peeling off less important ones through several rounds. We were, however, not able to employ the same panel in all rounds of the investigation due to dropout as the respondents felt that participation was too time consuming. Page 5 line 17-20.

5. Instructions to the participants. The panellists were addressed with an open question “What competencies in a primary care setting are desired for management of allergy patients?” and asked to express it in their own words. The invitation was sent to 15 general practitioners, 5 asthma/ COPD nurses and 15 secondary care physicians”. Page 5, last line and page 6 line 1-6.

6. All suggestions were categorised into four domains: knowledge, diagnostics, therapy and communication. Only repeated statements were omitted, and the remaining statements were incorporated into a questionnaire of 80 items. Statements that contained multiple concepts were split to different items. There was also place left for other comments or suggestions and the respondents were encouraged to add competences not listed. Process of reviewing: page 6, line 1-5.

7-8. Conclusions. This part has been rewritten. The most significant findings of the present study were importance of communication with the patients and a
special caution regarding children with allergy. Thus a referral to a paediatrician was recommended for children with food allergy and occurrence of specific IgE. In addition to medical guidelines, training programmes should deal with communication skills. Trans-professional training programme was suggested to give the whole team the same recommendations, in order to promote consistent information to the patients. It is possible that that this last reflection would have been captured by other means than Delphi method and that the participation of nurses has contributed to give it the importance it deserves. Core competencies for good practice amongst primary care providers may constitute a reference for primary care of allergy patients and can be used for accreditation of primary care units.

Minor essential revisions:

9. The role of nurses is commented in the background p 3 line 11-14, in discussion p 10, line 6-8 and in conclusions p 11, two bottom lines.

10. Rounds 1, 2 and 3 have replaced “questionnaires.” The distinction between invitees vs respondents has been made, for instance in the table 1.

11. “The cut point of 3.25 was an arbitrary decision as it corresponds to 75% of answers scoring 2 to 4 points (desirable - necessary)2 is explained on page 6, line 3-4 from the bottom.

12. “All suggestions were categorised into four domains: knowledge, diagnostics, therapy and communication. Only repeated statements were omitted, and the remaining statements were incorporated into a questionnaire of 80 items. Statements that contained multiple concepts were split to different items. There was also place left for other comments or suggestions and the respondents were encouraged to add competences not listed” is mentioned on page 6, line 1-5 and 13-14.

13. The “conclusion-part” has been rewritten.

14. The practice gaps regarding other allergic diseases than asthma are commented in the background page 3, line 14-15.

15. The utility, strengths and limitations of the Delphi process is commented in discussion, page 9.

16. This issue has been commented in the present version of conclusions. The most significant findings of the present study were importance of communication with the patients and a special caution regarding children with allergy. Thus a referral to a paediatrician was recommended for children with food allergy and occurrence of specific IgE.

17. No striking differences were observed between the items generated by specialists versus generalists. Although all respondents were encouraged to suggest additional competencies in all rounds, no additional skills were generated by the second or third round. Page 7, line 11-12.

18. An example how findings from a Delphi study have been used to guide curriculum development: “In a recent report, a national Canadian pediatric trauma curriculum has been developed using the Delphi process. This curriculum was created from scratch by four experts who developed aims, objectives and
skill sets through three rounds to reach consensus. The draft was later evaluated by 11 site coordinators and a final curriculum was established [10] p 4, line 10-14.