Reviewer's report

Title: Randomized Controlled Trial Comparing Four Strategies for Delivering e-Curriculum to Health Care Professionals [ISRCTN88148532]

Version: 1  Date: 27 September 2005

Reviewer: John M Harris Jr.

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a well-written paper that seeks to answer a straightforward and practical question, which of four approaches to the distribution of an online curriculum in herbs and dietary supplements leads to better educational outcomes. The methods used to answer this question are appropriate and the material is logically presented. The most significant shortcoming is only in the usefulness of the results within the educational community. Can the finding of no difference between the four tested approaches be extrapolated to other types of educational content delivered by the same methods or to similar content delivered by analogous methods, such as postal mail, where the general strategy of "drip-push" is similar to that tested by the authors? Less discussion about the general need for HDS education, which the authors have covered in their previous papers on this program, and more about the general educational implications, would be helpful.

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

None

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

There is a potential conflict in the text: "Completion rates did not differ by delivery strategy" and "Delivery strategy also emerged as a significant predictor of completion..." The authors should reconcile this apparent conflict for the reader.

There are several typographical errors. The "notes" to Table 4 has an extra word, "represents" following "A change of 10..." Item 11 in Appendix 2 states "H'DS," which should be "H/DS."

I would recommend using another example for Appendix 1. The example provided, "Infant vitamins module," does not reflect well on the educational program. A "true" answer deals with the long-term possible effects of vitamin D deficiency in adults. There is no literature supporting a link between prostate cancer and breast cancer (among others) and vitamin D deficiency during infancy. This answer is potentially misleading and could be considered "false" by a reasonable person, within the context of a question on infant vitamins. Rather than have the reader focus on this small element of the program, it would be better to present a less problematic example.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

As noted, a broader commentary on the educational implications of the work and/or on analogous
research in other contexts would be helpful.

**What next?:** Accept after discretionary 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 am employed by an organization that develops and distributes online continuing medical education programs.