Reviewer's report

Title: If You Feed Them, They Will Come: A Prospective Study of the Effects of Complimentary Food on Attendance and Physician Attitudes at Medical Grand Rounds at an Academic Medical Center

Version: 1 Date: 16 May 2007

Reviewer: Don E Moore

Reviewer's report:

General
1. This is an important study because previously no evidence existed to support decision-making in the area of the study. The findings will be useful to individuals who have responsibilities for planning and managing regularly scheduled conferences in hospitals and academic medical centers. The study shows that the provision of complimentary food increases attendance at medical grand rounds.

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

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

The study shows that the provision of complimentary food increases attendance at medical grand rounds. It might be more informative if the global attendance figures are broken down into types of attendees. From statements in other parts of the text, I presume that attendees are faculty, fellows, and residents. But in addition to physicians, faculty could be PhDs or others. In addition, other health professionals often attend grand rounds. I guess I am suggesting that the findings would be more helpful if broken down by type of attendee.

Because the findings strongly suggest that complimentary food increases attendance, the generalizability of the findings beyond grand rounds should be mentioned. I could imagine someone using these findings out of context to support the provision of free food at dinner meetings.

Another comment that would be helpful concerns the fact that grand rounds are scheduled at lunch time (noon). That complimentary lunch increases attendance almost seems like a no-brainer or self fulfilling prophecy should be discussed. Mentioning that clinics are typically scheduled on both sides of grand rounds, I think, is important to point out. More to the point, however, I think that physicians attend grand rounds due to a combination of reasons: convenience, topic, and food. While this study focuses on food (and it is important to do that because it is a common question in practical CME management), I think it is important to put the role of food in context. Otherwise physicians could be pictured to be attending just for the food, and we know that is not the case, for the great majority of attendees.

I think more needs to be said about the subtle influences of pharmaceutical support. As I am sure the authors know, it has been a hot topic recently. While I am sure almost all physicians will state they are not influenced, there is increasingly convincing reports about the subtle influences of pharmaceutical support, both on speakers and attendees. I realize that the survey did not cover this issue, but a statement about these recent reports would provide context for this study’s results.

Finally, I am sure that the selection of the statistical techniques are correct for the type of data in the study, but as a help for statistically challenged readers, I recommend that the specific reason why a technique was chosen and a reference with page for each technique be provided.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.