Reviewer's report

Title: "Snake-oil," "quack medicine," and "industrially cultured organisms:" Biovalue and the commercialization of human microbiome research

Version: 1  Date: 25 September 2012

Reviewer: Joyce Ikingura

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“Snake –oil,” “quack medicine,” and “industrial cultured organisms:” biovalue and the commercialization of human microbiome research
Slashinski MJ et al

REVIEWER’S REPORT

Minor essential revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes. The question posed is well defined; the article seeks to document ethical, legal and social challenges surrounding the commercialization of human microbiome research products to the consumers.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods chosen to conduct the semi structured and in depth interviews were appropriate. Other interviewees were recruited through snowballing method, and Informed consent was verbal. The methods are appropriate given the nature of the subject matter and related implications.

3. Are the data sound?
Data is sound and derived from the methods used. However I could not see where exactly the authors were teasing out legal challenges in the methodology and results.

Under Methods section para 3, the authors state that ‘We limit our findings to ethical and social considerations…… ‘This seems to show that although initially they wanted to cover also legal issues, they did not. This should therefore be reported under the study limitations.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards?
Yes. But for completeness this has to be checked by the BMC Editors

5. Are the discussions and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes. The authors discussions are well balanced. However I felt there was a need to include in this study the views of the representatives of the general public as consumers of these commercialized products. They would have provided information that would add social value of this study results.
The legal challenges in this study would relate to the information that must be passed on to the consumers to know exactly what they are engaging in. The manufacturers of these products should take a legal responsibility of ensuring that what they are selling promotes good health, in the real sense and not to create hype. The information should be backed by the manufacturers for safety and better health and regulated by the regulatory authorities.

6. Are the limitations of the work clearly stated?
The limitations on the legal aspects were not well reported and therefore should have been mentioned under this section.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished.
   Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found
   More, so but they should add on legal issues in the methodology and results.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   I recommend the writing to be acceptable for publication as it is shedding more light on the topic which is uncommonly reported.

   Discretionary revisions
   Minor essential revisions
   On results last paragraph before Public Awareness of the benefits….. section
   The authors may consider to add
   …. within this new paradigm of health, the marketing strategies should ensure they inform the consumers what they are selling and what the consumers should expect. The information to be passed on must be backed by science and ethical, without which the ethical issue of therapeutic misconception may arise.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

see my report above