Author’s response to reviews

Title: Understanding and Retention of informed consent process among Parents in a Rural Northern Ghana

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear BiomedCentral Editorial Team

RE: MS 1699410949145022

Title: Understanding and retention of informed consent process among parents in a rural northern Ghana

Thank you for considering our manuscript for publication in your journal. We have made the necessary changes and reviews as requested by the three reviewers.

Version: 4 Date: 05 May, 2008

Below, please find the responses.
Reviewer 1: Alan R Tait

Reviewer's report: The authors have done a good job responding to the reviewers' comments. However, I still believe that the introduction and discussion are way too long. I am concerned that the excessive length will lose the reader. The theme that informed consent and its understanding thereof is an ethical imperative is repeated over and over again. Much of this can be deleted without losing the message. There are still a few typos and grammatical mistakes that require attention.

Response: the manuscript has been substantially and carefully edited resulting in significant reduction in the word count without losing any of the key points. The word count has been reduced by 15.2% from 7542 to 6396 words; the abstract from 387 to 341 words, the introduction from 908 to 644 words, the methods 1177 to 1146 words, the results from 1073 to 1115 to 173 words and finally the discussion from 2508 to 1747 words.

In addition, typos and grammatical mistakes have been corrected.
Reviewer 2: Christine Grady

Reviewer's report

The authors have added more context and limitations within which to understand their findings. The additional tables are very helpful.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Pretty well

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? yes

3. Are the data sound? yes

4. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Pretty much

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? yes

9. Is the writing acceptable? Could use some additional editing, otherwise OK

The paper could still use some serious editing.

Response: the manuscript has been seriously edited resulting in substantially reduction in the word count without losing any of the key points. The word count has been reduced by 15.2% from 7542 to 6396 words. The abstract from 387 to 341, the introduction from 908 to = 644, the methods from 1177 to 1146, the results from 1073 to 1115 to 173 and the discussion from 508 to 1747.

In addition, typos and grammatical mistakes have been corrected.

Comment: There are sentences that need to be restructured or divided for clarity. An example is the 1rst sentence of the last par on page 14. It currently says: This study evaluated comprehension and retention of the informed consent process in northern Ghana, an area where significant research interventions with ethical implications
continue to be carried out by using an informed consent process in an earlier cohort study involving children and their parents. Perhaps better would be something like: This study evaluated comprehension and retention of study information by a cohort of parents who had enrolled their children in a malaria study in northern Ghana. A significant amount of research that presents ethical challenges, including informed consent, has been conducted in this area of Ghana.

**Response:** the sentence has been restructured to read as follows: This study evaluated comprehension and retention of study information by a cohort of parents who had enrolled their children in a malaria study in northern Ghana. A significant number of research studies that present ethical challenges, including informed consent, have been conducted in this area. Page 11, 2nd paragraphs

**Comments:** There are some sentences that I do not understand. For example, on page 4 in the introduction, I do not know what the authors mean in this sentence: This is because some potential participants perspectives on research are usually embedded in ideas that are linked to wider dilemmas and hence their participation in research may initially involve a perceived balance of benefits and risks.

**Response:** the statement has been edited out.

Another example is on page 17, mid par. Many at times, understanding is implied rather than verbally explicit.

**Response:** the statement has been edited out

**Comments:** And there are some sentences that I disagree with. For example on page 13 in the first par under Discussion, it says Indeed, informed consent exist only when there is full disclosure of all known or relevant information to potential participants in an all
inclusive manner such that they comprehend. Informed consent rarely aims to include full disclosure of all known information, and rather aims to include disclosure of information that is relevant to a potential participants decision making, including that there is uncertainty in research. FULL disclosure of ALL KNOWN information might be volumes. Also, what does an all-inclusive manner mean here?

**Response:** the statement has been edited out

Minor comments:

p. 10- check the numbers for married couples. **Corrected**

p.12 under correlation of characteristics- in all, younger parents had a consistent understanding do you mean more consistent?,

**Correction:** In all, younger parents had more consistent understanding of the consent process than the older ones.
Reviewer: Sassy S Molyneux

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions:

Comments. The introduction could be shortened and sharpened further. Eg remove most of the second paragraph, and merge and simplify the now third and fourth paragraphs.

Response: the introduction has been shortened from 908 to 644 words. Most of the second paragraph has been removed and the third and fourth paragraphs merged and simplified as requested by the reviewer.

Response - The study design is one very long paragraph. Could be broken down with several key sub-headings or issues of interest?

Response: The study design has been broken down into three as follows.

The cohort study design
The cohort study consent process:

The consent study design:

Comment. I would still argue for the need for an illustration of the questions asked because it is essential to understand the meaning of the answers and the rest of the paper.

Response: The following illustration is in the method section (1st paragraph of page 7).

‘‘The questionnaire was designed for a major question to be asked on each theme to determine whether information was given to the mother on that theme during the cohort study. Sub-questions were then asked to ascertain the parent’s appropriate recollection of the information that was disclosed. For instance, participants were asked if they knew the previous study involved risks and if yes, they were asked to mention some of the risks’’.
**Comment:** The discussion has been expanded as requested but is now unnecessarily lengthy. It could be substantially reduced without losing any of the key points. I would suggest that three or four key points are made (a paragraph each or so), after a simple paragraph on the limitations, and that there is a concluding paragraph on what further research might be conducted.

**Response:** the discussion has been carefully edited without losing the essential parts. The word count in the discussion has been reduced from 2508 to 1747.

The study limitation has also been edited and simplified.

Thank you very much and hope this addresses the remaining concerns.

Dr. Abraham oduro

Author of correspondence