Reviewer's report

Title: Physicians and Nurses Use and Recommend Dietary Supplements: Report of a Survey

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Reviewer: Gladys Block

Reviewer’s report:

This paper describes a study of a large (n=1127) survey of physicians and nurses and their use of and recommendation of dietary supplements. The chief reservation is one shared by all survey research, the possible nonrepresentativeness of the sample.

p. 3, last sentence, beginning “Specialty supplements….”: I suggest being more cautious in wording. I believe there have been some unsupportive studies of glucosamine etc. Whatever their merits, it might be better to say something like “have been found in many studies to improve joint health.”

p.5. What is the age distribution of members of the All Global online panel? Is there information on when they got their MD? Is the All Global panel skewed toward younger doctors? Toward women? The panel is “used exclusively for market research studies” – not just by CRN? Who else uses it? Did the authors look at results on usage etc. by categories of when they got their MD? Later in the paragraph is says that they are selected on the basis of not being affiliated with a market research company. This seems strange, since the All Global panel is presumably a panel developed by a market research company.

p. 5 et seq: The little numbers in brackets ([j1] are unfamiliar. I was unable to access anything (presumably further data) from the pdf provided to reviewers.

p. 10, 2nd paragraph. It is critical to be sure that the authors’ claim that the Nurses and Health Professionals study data refer only to multivitamins is correct. Also, do the results reported, of about one-third, refer to the baseline data (1980 and 1986)? The questions have been asked repeatedly.

p. 11, top. Do the data on male physicians refer to the screening in 1982?

p.11, middle paragraph, sentence beginning “However, the magnitude…”, especially “…as well as…”: Reference to EARs, RDAs & AIs and the import of these differences may be unclear to the uninitiated.

p.11, last paragraph: “These respondents therefore could potentially be self-selected….”. “Are likely to be self-selected” would be more accurate.

p. 12, Conclusions. The point that the reader should be deriving from these data is not very clear throughout. Then, the last sentence is not persuasive. No matter how positive one might feel about supplements, the fact that lots of smart people
take them does not “provide support for the proposition that such use is rational and has potential for conferring benefit”.

It is interesting that (this sample of) physicians/nurses report taking supplements, given that mainstream medicine appears to be negative about them. Some exploration about the possible reasons for this discrepancy would make this a more interesting paper. Are respondents younger? Are opinions among medical professionals changing over the generations? Or over time?

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.