Author's response to reviews

Title: Research Collaboration in Tehran University of Medical Sciences: two decades after integration

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Thank you for taking time to respond.

We would like to thank the reviewers for going through our article.

Dr. Rodriguez has been most kind in carefully reading our manuscript again.

We have read her comments and tried to correct/modify the manuscript as advised.

The details of our modifications are as follows:

1. I would suggest however a greater semantic coherence between the research questions as stated in the ‘Abstract’ and on page 4.

   “How much do researchers and decision makers collaborate in different stages of research? And which factors affect it?” was added on page 4.

2. Only an additional remark: Eleven (11) years have passed between 1995, the year in which the integration of medical universities into the Ministry of Health in Iran took place, until 2006, year in which the authors performed their investigation, and not twenty (20) years as the authors have noted in the second paragraph on page 4.

   The year was corrected to 1985. (Thank you for pointing out our mistake to us!)

3. …confusion regarding the population under study persists. In my opinion, and as the authors state in the ‘Abstract’, the population under study is 'completed research projects' granted in 2004 and over by 2006. From this, two different sources of data' have been identified, namely proposals and final research reports, and principal investigators; and two different 'tools or instruments' have been used for collecting the data: a data collection form (for proposals/final reports) and a self-fulfilled questionnaire addressed to the principal investigators. However, the authors confusingly state on page 5 that they have worked with two study populations.

   The ‘Population under study’ section’s subheadings were modified.

4. I have, however, more problems understanding how the set of ‘academic variables’ that can be associated with the extent/nature of collaboration help explain why there is so little collaboration between researchers and decision-makers, and this after the integration of medical universities into the Ministry of Health. For instance, are there more tenure-track positions at the TUMS because of this integration? Or has the percentage of total time allocated to research by a particular researcher changed because of the integration? At first glance, I do not think so. Then, I cannot understand the influence of these variables on the collaboration score after the integration. Closely related to this, what are the ‘variables’ of the academic/health context that have changed because of the integration? In my view, the identification of such variables would be necessary in order to “help research policy makers realize how much a change of context has affected collaboration …” (page 4).

   “Here it is worth mentioning that our study only describes the status of collaboration after integration, and does not speculate the impact of integration on collaboration.” was added on
page 4. However, we completely accept the point the reviewer has raised. Integration is very important and the evaluation of its impact is significant. But since there are no data to compare before and after integration, the title of the article was changed. Other minor changes were made on page 4 and in the discussion.

5. The weak sections of the paper are the last ones: ‘Discussion’ and ‘Conclusions’. The authors repeat descriptive statements about their main findings, but no real discussion is offered. Further, there is no clear connection between what the authors have learned in their investigation and what has already been published in the scholarly literature on the topic of collaboration between researchers and practitioners/decision makers. In addition, recommendations on the basis of their results would be expected in order to improve knowledge transfer in this context, as would directions for future research. The discussion and conclusion sections have been thoroughly edited.