Author's response to reviews

Title: Twelve years of clinical practice guideline development, dissemination and evaluation in Canada (1994 to 2005)

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editorial team,

Thank you for your interest in our paper and request for revisions. We appreciate the reviewers’ careful review of the manuscript. The following Revision Notes provide our response to the first reviewer’s comments and suggestions.

We are unable to calculate the response rate as requested by the reviewer. As you will see below, we have calculated the response rate as was done for the earlier publication focused on the first 6 years (Method 1 below). However, we could add an additional calculation as per method 2,3,4 below. We believe that this will be confusing for the reader and would prefer to use the same approach to the earlier publication to facilitate comparison across time frames.

We are seeking the opinion of the editorial team on how best to handle this situation.

Sincerely,

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Revision Notes

The reviewer’s comments are included to preserve the context of our responses. 

Our responses to the reviewers are in italics.

Reviewer 1

✅ The revised manuscript is clearer on how response rates are calculated and I understand the practical difficulties in reporting response rates based on individual guideline development organization. However, I am not entirely clear with the authors’ rationale for counting English and French versions of the same guideline twice. I understand that the CMA database assigns a unique identifier for French and English versions of the same guideline, but it should be possible to count translated versions only once since the authors report only on 630 unique guidelines in their analysis and results. Unique guidelines would appear to be the most natural and intuitive denominator for calculation of the response rate (one would not count bilingual respondents twice when doing a survey). I would therefore recommend that response rates be calculated based on unique guidelines, unless compelling reasons can support the current approach.
We appreciate the reviewer’s concern and would like to comply with the request. Regrettably we are not able to calculate the response rate as requested because CMA is not able to tell us how many guidelines had two versions during the two time periods as this information is not archived and there is no way to go back and figure it out.

To be clear, the problem is that we can not determine the total number of unique guidelines (the denominator): we are unable to calculate the response rate by counting the English and French guidelines only once because although we know which guidelines are available in both languages in the numerator (consisting of responders), for the denominator we do not know the number of unique guidelines in the total (responders + non-responders). The Infobase assigns a unique number for both English and French versions of the same guideline and we do not know how many non-responders also produce bilingual guidelines.

However, we could report response rate in an alternate way if the reviewer prefers and would propose that we do so consistently across both time periods. Note that by doing so, we may underestimate the response rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines</th>
<th>Total 12 yr period</th>
<th>1994-1999</th>
<th>2000-2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>1032</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French only</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responders with guidelines listed in the Infobase</td>
<td>1664</td>
<td>1012</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Unique CPGs</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of guidelines in Infobase</td>
<td>2341</td>
<td>1446</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-responders</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can envisage four methods for the calculation of response rate:

1. **Response Rate = Total responders / total CPGs in the InfoBase.** This is the approach used currently, and in the publication for the first 6 years.
   - Total 12 year period: 1664 / 2341 = 71%
   - 1994-1999: 1012/1446 = 70%
   - 2000-2005: 652/895 = 73%

2. **Response Rate = Unique CPGs / total CPGs in the InfoBase.** Note this option underestimates response rate, since there are bilingual guidelines among responders included in the total CPGs (inflated denominator).
   - Total 12 year period: 1360 / 2341 = 58%
   - 1994-1999: 730 / 1446 = 50%
   - 2000-2005: 630 / 895 = 70%

3. **Response Rate = Unique CPGs / Unique CPGs + Non Responders.** Note this option still underestimates response rate, since there may have been additional bilingual guidelines among
non-responders (inflated denominator) but by less than option 2. However, explaining this option may prove to be more confusing for readers.

Total 12 year period: $\frac{1360}{1360+677} = \frac{1360}{2037} = 67 \%$
1994-1999: $\frac{730}{730+434} = \frac{730}{1164} = 63 \%$
2000-2005: $\frac{630}{630+243} = \frac{630}{873} = 72 \%$

4. Response Rate = Unique CPGs / Estimated total unique CPGs (ie we assume the proportion of bilingual CPGs would be the same for responders and non responders). It is impossible to know whether the proportion of bilingual guidelines is the same for non-responders, so this estimate may inflate or underestimate the true response rate. However, it is interesting that this may be the most fair of the estimation methods, and it produces the same results as option 1. This method would also be challenging to explain clearly to readers.

Total 12 yr period
Proportion of unique guidelines: $\frac{1360}{1664}=81.7\%$
$\frac{1360}{2341}(81.7) = 71\%$

1994-1999
Proportion of unique guidelines: $\frac{730}{1012} =72.1\%$
$\frac{730}{1446}(72.1\%) = 70\%$

2000-2005
Proportion of unique guidelines: $\frac{630}{652} = 96.6 \%$
$\frac{630}{895}(96.6\%) = 73\%$

Finally, it should be noted that by calculating the response rate as per option 2 or 3 for the earlier time period we will appear to contradict our earlier published results which were calculated and reported as per option 1. In effect, notwithstanding the benefits or limitations of counting the French and English version as separate surveys, we prefer to report the response rate in the same fashion as presented in the earlier paper as per option 1.