Author’s response to reviews

Title: Enhancing capacity for risk factor surveillance at the regional/local level: A follow-up review of the findings of the Canadian Think Tank Forum after 4 years

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Version: 2
Date: 11 November 2013

Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Please find attached our revised article as per your letter dated September 30, 2013. We have addressed each the points raised by the reviewers, and these are detailed in the letter below. We hope that you find these changes satisfactory and we look forward to hearing your decision on our manuscript.

Kind regards,

Dr. Bernard Choi
Canada

Dear Editor,

Editor’s comment:
Add information to the title of the tables in reference to the study, place and time

Response: Having removed tables 1 through 4 based on a suggestion of reviewer Thelen, we have added the study name (Think Tank Forum), place and time to the remaining Table 1.

Major compulsory revisions (Marieke Verschuuren)

1) The paper has two objectives: to report on and to provide a follow-up review of the findings of the think tank Forum. In the methods and results section, only the first objective is addressed. It seems that the methods related to the follow-up review are being described in the 2nd paragraph of the discussion, but the information is so minimal, that it is hard to picture what exactly was done. This should be elaborated more. A lot of the information provided under discussion in fact seem to be results related to the 2nd objective of the paper. The structure of the paper should be improved taking into account the above.

Response: We have revised the methods and results sections to more clearly reflect the process undertaken during the Think Tank Forum and the subsequent results. We have restructured the paper so that follow up actions that previously appeared in the discussion now appear in the results section.

Major compulsory revisions (Marieke Verschuuren)

2) At the end of the paper, it is stated that: "It is beneficial to relate CARRFS activities back to the recommendations of the think tank Forum which created CARFSS in the first place." From the paper however it does not become clear that such a comparison is being made. It would probably help if these activities were listed in the results section, and then clearly compared with the Forum's recommendations.

Discretionary revisions (Jürgen Thelen)
More details could be given on the follow-up actions taken as a consequence of the findings of the small group discussions, if there were any (e.g. in the Results Section under the relevant paragraph). In addition it would be of interest which problems the stakeholders are facing concerning their objective to enhance capacity for risk factor surveillance at regional/local level.

Response: We have included a more thorough description of relevant CARRFS activities in the results section along with the synthesised recommendations from the Think Tank. In the discussion, we have summarised which recommendations have been acted upon and which recommendations remain to be followed up.

Discretionary revisions (Jürgen Thelen)

To my assessment, a summary of recent developments regarding the practical conclusions derived from the findings would help to complete the picture (e.g. which follow-up of the findings has been undertaken in the CARRFS; are there more examples that could be given in the results section under paragraph 5 (page 15) to strengthen the proposals regarding the next steps to build capacity for regional/local area surveillance). In particular the themes STRATEGY (e.g. What is the state of play regarding strategy development and who will be in charge of developing it?) and EVALUATION (e.g. who should evaluate, what should be the evaluation criteria) would be improved by concrete examples.

Response: As we have noted above, we have summarized the activities undertaken by CARRFS to address the issues raised at the Think Tank. In the conclusion, we have also identified that there continue to be opportunities to forward these points. Concrete examples of activities undertaken to address the STRATEGY themes are included in the results section. In the discussion section we have summarized the areas where progress has been made and areas where additional actions remain to be taken. As CARRFS continues to develop, we hope to publish further follow up articles on activities and outcomes.

Minor essential revisions: (Marieke Verschuuren)

1) It would be nice to have some background information on the development of the questions that were posed to the think tank Forum. What were they based on?

Response: The questions were developed by a planning committee of the Think Tank. They reflect a standard process in community development (in this case, the community is that of local/regional risk factor surveillance professionals) characterised by 1) Identifying current status/describing the situation/problem 2) Identifying community needs 3) Identifying possible solutions to needs 4) Identifying next steps for action. We have identified this on page 7.
2) On page 12 a franchise model, a turnkey package and a global support system are mentioned as elements of a good practice example. It would be nice to have some more information on these elements, as now it remains quite abstract.

Response: We have described these components more concretely on page 12 of the article.

3) Page 15: reference to table 3: should be table 5.

Response: This has been changed on page 15 to Table 1 as other tables have been deleted.

Discretionary revisions (Jürgen Thelen)

(3) Regarding the Tables 1-4, it is questioned if these four tables need to be elaborated in such a comprehensive matter. As only one table (Table 2) is referred to explicitly in the text, the authors could consider summarizing the statements from tables 1-4 in a single overview chart, leaving aside the “answers” (or statements) that come off badly. Another possibility would be to integrate the most important findings/answers in the text. For this purpose the very brief reference regarding the major issues of the discussion groups could be elaborated further. (see Results page 8) In any case the results given in the tables need some more explanation to be better understandable (were the statements/answers worked out during the small group discussions or were these statements/answers formulated before; what was the ranking procedure like) The main outcome (Table 5) should be kept and elements of this table could be used to elaborate the seven themes in more detail.

Response: We have removed Tables 1 through 4 and highlighted the most frequently identified responses in the text on pages 8 and 13.