Author’s response to reviews

Title: What motivates new, established and long-term users of herbal medicine: Is there more than push and pull?

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Version: 1 Date: 17 Mar 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for your March 5th E-mail regarding the status of our manuscript “What motivates new, established and long-term users of herbal medicine: Is there more than push and pull?” (BCAM-D-18-01620).

We are very grateful to both reviewers for strongly encouraging publication of our work. In the revised version of the manuscript, we have included the suggestions by the reviewers. A version of the manuscript in which these revisions are highlighted is included for your convenience, and a point-by-point response to the reviewer comments follows below. We respectfully ask that you accept our revised manuscript for publication.

Sincerely,

Klaus Menrad

Detailed response to comments:

Reviewer 1:

"Very good analysis of the topic.

The authors should proffer explanation why people in the age group above 60 appear to use more HM in the new, established and long term? Has it got to do with age-related illness?"
Answer: We would like to thank the reviewer for his very positive assessment of our work! Regarding his suggestion, we note that when examining these data one must consider that the age group “above 60” was the largest one in our sample, because our sample was resembling the age distribution of the general German population. We have added a statement on page 10 of our revised manuscript which clarifies the issue, which reads: “It should be noted that people who were 60 years or older resembled the largest fraction of participants (33.3 %), because our sample reflected the general German population. This needs to be taken into account when comparing the absolute values of frequencies reported in Table 1.”

Reviewer 2:

"This is a nicely written paper which tackles important aspects of the use of herbal medicine in Germany. The representative survey conducted and presented here, elucidates reasons for and factors determining the use of herbal medicine on a sound data base. The statistical analyses performed appear to be appropriate and well conducted. The method section is comprehensive as is the results section. The presentation of alpha-level (significance level) and the presentation of p-values appears to be somewhat inconsistent (please see my remarks in the PDF-file)."

Answer: We would like to thank the reviewer very much for her very positive assessment of our work and for providing feedback on the notation in our paper. We agree and have included all suggestions provided by the reviewer in our revised manuscript.

"The introduction refers to the relevant literature and provides a good basis for the understanding of the research question, while the discussion is appropriate and the authors show sufficient distance and criticism of their own work. The cited literature is appropriate.

Overall, this is a very nice piece of work!"

Answer: Again, we thank the reviewer for her very positive rating of our work!

"In order to lift this well written paper based on a nicely conducted study on an even higher level, I would like to see two additional aspects discussed:

1) Is it possible, that there is an overall shift from «going to a practitioner», such as a homeopath or an acupuncturist, towards the use of herbal medicine? Especially the new group of users, who have a lower education and socioeconomic status and experience their health factors poor may simply not have the financial resources to go to a practitioner. Nonetheless, they may decide for herbal medicine because it is the only CAM entity they can afford."

Answer: Indeed, this is a very interesting hypothesis! We note that we have already studied exactly this issue mentioned by the reviewer, and our work reporting on it is currently being reviewed for publication in another journal. Therefore, we agree with the reviewer that we could
mention this idea already in this paper, and hence have revised the text on page 16 of our manuscript as follows: “It is mentioned that new users were more often unemployed, which could potentially impact their decision to use HM, since it is usually associated with smaller costs than many other CAM forms, such as chiropractic treatments. While our focus in this work was on the reasons for HM usage, further aspects of the user characteristics will be studied in future work.”

"2) Not all herbal medicine is safe, not only for reasons of the herb itself or the quality of it's preparation. Some herbs may interact with conventional drugs, such as e.g. for cardiovascular disorders. Please include safety aspects of the use of herbal medicine, in particular as self medication in your manuscript."

Answer: We fully agree with the reviewer on the issue of safety and that underestimating the potential side and interaction effects of HM is potentially harmful and bears risk. We also entirely agree that this should be mentioned in our manuscript, and hence have revised the text on page 16 as follows: “Among these was the reason that HM is “healthier” than CM showing that patients have potentially underestimated the possible interaction and side effects of HM usage, which is an important safety issue that was often discussed in the literature.”