Author’s response to reviews

Title: Head and neck cancer survivors’ preferences for and evaluations of a post-treatment dietary intervention

Authors:

Sylvia Crowder (sylviac2@illinois.edu)
Katherine Douglas (kgd2@illinois.edu)
Andrew Fruge (fruge@auburn.edu)
William Carroll (wcarroll@uabmc.edu)
Sharon Spencer (sspencer@uabmc.edu)
Julie Locher (jlocher@uabmc.edu)
Wendy Demark-Wahnefried (demark@uab.edu)
Laura Rogers (rogersl@uab.edu)
Anna Arthur (aarthur@illinois.edu)

Version: 1 Date: 01 Aug 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
COLLEGE OF ACES
905 S GOODWIN AVENUE
URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801 July 31, 2019

Holly L Nicastro, Editor-in-Chief
Dear Dr. Nicastro,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a revision to our manuscript entitled “Head and neck cancer survivors’ preferences for and evaluations of a post-treatment dietary intervention” which my co-authors and I are pleased to resubmit for publication in Nutrition Journal. The revised article describes our original work, and it has not been submitted for publication elsewhere.

We thank the editors and reviewers for their thoughtful comments. We have made revisions based on these suggestions and believe it has greatly strengthened the content of our manuscript. In order to expedite your decision, we have highlighted the revised content in red. Below please find detailed responses to the reviewer and editorial comments.

Reviewer 1 Comments for the Author:

Reviewer #1: This paper describes the preferences and views of a pilot study of 24 people with head and neck cancer randomized six months after the end of treatment to a 12 week trial of weekly dietary advice or weekly advice with goal setting.

Major issues:

I realize that this is a pilot study but it is small, the sample is heterogeneous (in terms of tumor site and stage) and not representative (of 350 people screened only 24 were recruited - I am not convinced by the argument that it has similar demographics to SEER p12 line 297). In addition, the intervention took place six months post treatment which interestingly few participants thought was the optimum time. And the evaluation used simple questions rather than a more sophisticated approach like willingness to pay that may better elicit preferences. I think the authors need to acknowledge these limitations more clearly and tone down their conclusions as I think this study alone provides limited evidence to inform the design of future dietary interventions for people with head and neck cancer.

Response: The statement regarding the SEER demographic population has been removed.

Line 295-297: Furthermore, the evaluation methods were purely descriptive and additional qualitative probing of preferences through semi-structured interviews would have increased the robustness of the research findings.
Line 299-302: Additionally, this intervention took place six months post-treatment while the majority of participants preferred a dietary intervention to take place before treatment. Future interventions should emphasize a pre-treatment intervention in accordance to survivor preferences.

Minor issues:

1. Page 3 line 84 - "calories" should be replaced with "energy"
Response: This has been updated.

2. Page 8 lines 206-208 - removing the repeated sentence
Response: The sentences have been collapsed. The questions about the study and the program are now in the same sentence.
Line 206-207: All but one participant would recommend the study and program to others while one participant was neutral.

3. Page 11 line 272 - Medicare coverage is a parochial issue rather than a universal concern - the discussion should acknowledge this by saying something like "In some countries such as the US...."
Response: This has been updated.
Line 271-272: For example, in the United States, Medicare coverage only includes outpatient medical nutrition therapy provided by a RDN....

4. Page 12 line 290 - I don't think this study shows that there is "high demand for dietary interventions among HNC survivors" - I think this overstates what the observed
Response: We thank the reviewer for the suggestion.
Line 289-290: This study adds to the existing body of literature for dietary interventions among HNC survivors.
Reviewer 2 Comments for the Author:

Reviewer #2: The authors report the qualitative results of a pilot randomized controlled trial comparing a 12-week dietary program that included weekly telephone counselling from a registered dietitian nutritionist (control) or weekly telephone counselling plus specific goals for vegetable consumption (intervention). Participants' program preferences and feedback were collected. This research is important as it lays the foundation for building future dietary interventions for people with head and neck cancer. The paper was well written and clear. There are a few clarifications that should be addressed:

Major comments:
1. Since the two groups received slightly different programs, it would seem important to compare program preferences between groups, either in writing or in a table. If there are no differences, then combining the data is appropriate.

Response: Table 2 has been updated to compare program preferences between groups.

2. Section "Study and intervention (program) evaluation" (Lines 202-212)

It is stated in the methods that "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree" were collapsed into one category and "neutral", "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree" were collapsed into another. Please provide labels for these new categories and present the results using those new categories. Also, for clarity, please state the number of participants agreeing or disagreeing with each question or state in a table.

Response: Table 3 has been added to the manuscript to compare the categories between groups.

Minor comments:
1. In general, throughout the results, if the number of respondents is presented, also note the percentage (if not stated in a table).

Response: The tables have been updated to reflect the number and percent.

2. In the future, "double barreled" survey questions should be avoided. For example, the question "the study staff was helpful and easy to contact", should be divided into "the study
staff was helpful" and "the study staff was easy to contact", as these are different concepts. The study staff could have been helpful but not easy to contact or vice versa.

Response: We have acknowledged this as a limitation of the study.

Line 297-299: The current study utilized open-ended questions. However, some statements assessed more than one result. For instance, “the study staff was helpful and easy to contact” should have been asked as two separate questions.

We again thank the editors and reviewers for their helpful comments and for the kind consideration of our revised manuscript for publication in Nutrition Journal. Please contact me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Anna E. Arthur, PhD, MPH, RD
Assistant Professor, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition
University of Illinois
(217) 300 – 3014
aarthur@illinois.edu