

Subject: PLoS ONE Decision [09-PONE-RA-14368R1-A]

From: PLoS ONE@plos.org

Date: Tue, 15 Jun 2010 17:25:31 UT

To: harri.hemila@helsinki.fi

Dear Dr. Hemila,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript "Zinc lozenges may shorten the duration of colds: a systematic review" to PLoS ONE. After careful consideration, we believe that your study has the potential to be published by PLoS ONE provided you revise a few fundamental aspects of your paper, as described below. You must revise accordingly and explain your revisions in a covering letter if you wish for us to consider your paper further for publication.

While your manuscript cannot be accepted in its present form, we are willing to consider further a revised version in which the issues raised by the academic editor (and reviewers) have been adequately addressed. We cannot, of course, promise publication at that time.

Should you decide to revise the manuscript for further consideration here, your revisions should address the following specific points:

Dear Harri, I have been asked to arbitrate on your review. I am co-author of some 20 Cochrane reviews and tried to approach your review in an unbiased manner.

Having read it and having gone through the previous referees' comments, I can see both sides but believe they are connected. Let me try and explain with an example. I agree with you that asking for a definition of the common cold is nonsense. How you define it is irrelevant, how the authors of the primary studies define it is the issue. Because you have not produced a tabulation describing the included studies this point is lost on the readers. When it was pointed out that you are lone author and this is unusual practice in reviews, the referee is right. Your response was hard for me to justify. I am famous for having entered the placebo and intervention arm data the wrong way round in metanalysis. It is easily done, and that is why I will never load data on my own or without at least 2 other people checking it. I am also famous for having made a turkey of myself by accepting what Roche and its KOLs published. The lesson is: you can never be too careful. Why do you not ask one of your colleagues to check the data over for you and perhaps perform some transformations for you (see below)?

If I understand correctly you resorted to pure Fisherian probabilism because of heterogeneity of reporting. You rightly say that medians and ranges cannot be pooled with means and SDs. Why do you convert all outcomes into binary: "duration of common cold at day 5 Yes/No" ? If you do not want to do that there are methods for transformation using p values and 95% CIs.

Your inclusion criteria are hard to follow and the suggestion of using a PICODT structure is helpful. This is good work on an important. With a little bit of extra effort you can get it in its rightful place.

With best wishes,

Tom.

PS I have marked up the relevant comment for you in the attached file.

Please attend closely to our "Guidelines for Authors" and "Submission Checklist" when revising your manuscript. Upon resubmission, I will consider whether or not your changes have addressed all the comments, and I may choose to send the manuscript for further review to evaluate this. Please include a rebuttal letter with your re-submission providing a detailed list of responses to the comments raised and the

changes you have made in the manuscript; this response to the reviewers should be uploaded as a REBUTTAL LETTER file.

Please also provide a marked-up copy of the changes made from the previous article file as a SUPPORTING INFORMATION file. This can be done using 'track changes' in programs such as MS Word and/or highlighting any changes in the new document.

If possible, please resubmit your revised manuscript within 60 days. We quite understand that your revisions may take more time than this and would be happy to extend your due-date (simply email plosone@plos.org with an estimated date for the resubmission of your manuscript).

When your files are completely ready please resubmit your manuscript by logging on to our journal manuscript system at <http://one.plosjms.org/>; please ensure that you follow the 'revise manuscript' link to do this, rather than resubmitting your revised submission as a 'new submission'.

Thank you for your support of PLoS ONE.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Tom Jefferson
Academic Editor, PLoS ONE

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