Reviewer's report

Title: Strategies for improving patient recruitment to focus groups in primary care: a case study reflective paper using an analytical framework

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Reviewer: Kiek Tates

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General comments
In the literature, there is limited evidence on recruitment to focus groups, and problems regarding recruitment to focus groups studies are not commonly reported or discussed. The manuscript under review highlights the issues encountered in patient recruitment to focus groups and has important implications for researchers in terms of avoiding delays in returning for ethical approval. In my opinion, there is a need for this type of reflective papers, and this manuscript may serve as an example to other researchers.

Minor essential revisions
I would recommend the authors to provide more explanation in the text how to read Tables 1-3. These tables are very informative, but hardly readable on their own. The same applies to Table 4: it is only in the Discussion section that numbers and percentages are provided, whereas no percentages are given in Table 4. In addition, information should be added on the number of patients approached by GPs and nurses in order to get a valid view on the response rates.

In Table 2, the authors state that they might have overestimated the recruitment potential; did the researchers involve GPs in calculating the recruitment potential? This could be a valuable addition for future research.

The fact that the second modification to the recruitment strategy of directly inviting patients yielded adequate recruitment rates, underlines the importance of considering respondents’ engagement to the topic under discussion. I should recommend to elaborate on this issue in the discussion.

I would like to advise to add a timeline for the modifications made to the recruitment and consent procedures.

Discretionary revisions
Unfortunately, most researchers will recognize the fact that health professionals sometimes act as gatekeeper in recruiting patients for research, rather than following the inclusion criteria. I agree with the authors that researchers have to
spent much time in engaging providers to the research protocol. However, I am not sure whether education and training will be the panacea. It is my experience that a personal and regular contact with health professional and their practice administrators is prerequisite for adequate recruitment.

The authors state that their initial strategy contended with the wide geographical spread of practices, which meant that patients, unable to attend on arranged dates, could not easily join focus groups. In that regard, one might argue that regular face-to-face focus groups were not the optimal methodological choice and that researchers should consider other opportunities to collect qualitative data in hard to reach populations, e.g. online focus group discussions.

**Level of interest**: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English**: Acceptable

**Statistical review**: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests**: I declare that I have no competing interests.