Reviewer's report

Title: The influence of lifestyle beliefs on lifestyle behaviour following stroke: findings from a focus group study of patients and family members.

Version: 1 Date: 13 September 2010

Reviewer: Simon Cohn

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and well-written paper that draws on a relatively small amount of qualitative data to explore issues relating to lifestyle advice and behaviour change following stroke. Given the limitations of the sample size, and just relying on focus groups without additional sources, the data is nevertheless treated sensitively and with insight. Rather than making too many generalisations, some of the variance and contradictory opinions are explored, which is a welcome addition. The use of quotations is appropriate, and they are well integrated into the flow of the text.

Minor revisions:

1. The title of the paper implies that the research really addresses the relationship of beliefs with actual behaviour, which I personally don’t think captures the strength of the submission. Rather than the authors pursuing what might be the associations between subjective accounts and any objective measures of what they actually do, the paper gains its strength from looking at the ways people experience and then talk about a range of relevant factors.

2. The conclusion is surprisingly limited, given the dept of data offered in the results section. Even given a limited word count, a less tentative conclusion would serve to reaffirm the value of the qualitative study.

Major compulsory Revisions:

1. The methods section is adequate, but needs to be augmented in order for it to explicitly describe how the themes that arose during analysis and were agreed upon were linked to the prescribed categories driven by the psychological model employed and how this was reconciled when it did not. As currently described, it is not really clear how a genuinely ‘qualitative’ approach steered by what participants say in focus groups can be easily translated into categories that are predetermined and that don’t necessarily reflect the ways they themselves experience things or come to describe them.

2. It is also unclear how the TPB psychological model based on individual behaviour can be successfully integrated at a theoretical level with a family-based model.

3. This general concern about the applicability of framing the research with
something like the TPB is further amplified in the actual presentation of the data. Notwithstanding the fact that what people say is far removed from what they actually do, many of the quotations, and in fact much of the analysis, appears to either challenge or even refute a psychological theory that frames behaviour as the outcome of prior individual cognitive processes. In other words, what is most interesting is the fact that neither simple provision of information, nor general awareness about healthy lifestyle were in themselves sufficient to alter what people did, and that context, timing and the influence of the social environment were at least as crucial factors. It is therefore not clear what the TPB offers ‘as a lens’ in this paper, or if another model or theory might have led to different findings and interpretations.

Discretionary Revisions:

1. Consequently, if part of the argument of the paper is to critique the TPB model, as many others have now done from a range of disciplines, this might be of interest as a part of the paper’s argument – as it is, however, the TPB simply appears as a somewhat unnecessary addition. There are potentially many other ways of theoretically framing the fascinating data that might prove much more appropriate and productive in revealing new insights.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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