Reviewer's report

Title: Barriers to successful recruitment of parents of overweight children for an obesity prevention intervention: a qualitative study among youth health care professionals

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Reviewer: Anthea Magarey

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This study describes an important issue and one that researchers and service providers in many countries have experienced.

This study attempts to identify why referral by health professionals to an intervention to prevent further increase in relative weight of overweight children was so poor.

While a number of issues are identified few are new. The authors have not clearly identified what new knowledge this study provides. I found the discussion relatively weak and does not truly reflect the findings nor consider the professional role of the participants to the degree it could.

A wide range of barriers were identified that were classified under a number of headings - this classification was useful and relevant. What was unclear was how frequently each of the issues was raised by the professionals eg was the issue of parents lack of recognition raised by over half, or almost all or only two?

Major revisions

Background:
1. Participation in YHC greater than 90% - is this on an annual basis, at specific ages – more detail required

Methods
2. It is relevant to provide more information that led to this qualitative study. I assume an intervention was developed and based on previous experience of the difficulty of recruitment a specific strategy was developed; this is not clearly stated. A brief description of the intervention is required – eg the 'pilot' suggests a research study and that the intervention has not been proved as effective, what is the intervention format and commitment (eg number and length of sessions) and content. This should be followed by the description of the dissemination strategy which I think should be renamed a referral strategy as described in the first paragraph. Include the coverage of YHC professionals attending this – a defined geographical area, how many and what proportion of those eligible?

Much of this sits more logically in the introduction as it is the background to the current qualitative study
3. What was the response for children attending the 4y check (given they were invited the number should be known), and based on national data what proportion would be expected to be overweight?

4. Were they IOTF cut-points for assessing weight status?

5. What is meant by clinical judgement? Was any consideration made to previous assessment of weight status eg if child was tracking up?

6. It is questionable whether intervention should be advocated for a child identified as just in the overweight range based on a single assessment – this point needs to be discussed as it impacts on professional support for the referral strategy.

7. What happened to those children who were identified as obese? Are there services for those children and why would these not be used for the overweight children?

8. How were the 16 who were interviewed selected? Who conducted the interviews, were they 1:1 and what were the questions?

9. Analysis: what was the framework for the analysis of the transcripts?

Results

10. The quotes to illustrate points should either be entirely in the text OR entirely in the Table. It did not make for easy reading to have them split. I would prefer the table as the themes are then clear. The text then can give an indication of the frequency of identification from the 16 interviewees of the mention of each theme. (described as factor)

Discussion

11. This needs to be expanded. All five areas should be discussed. The authors say parent related issues were the most frequent but it is not possible to get a sense of that from the data as presented. It seems to me that professional issues (individual and organizational) are given considerable attention also. The socio-political environment requires consideration – how might the importance of early intervention be raised in society?

12. Professional responsibility requires further discussion. It is stated in the background that ‘YHC professionals systematically monitor the physical ….. health of children and advise parents and children on achieving a healthy development….. and signal possible problems such as ….overweight’. Do they not therefore have a professional responsibility to raise excess weight with parents although they may get an adverse reaction?

13. In the training of professionals was there discussion re the importance of early intervention? Did they support this and did they have sufficient information to advocate to parents re the benefits of attending the program? Did professionals support this early intervention and support the specific intervention
– was it evidenced based or a trial to develop an evidenced based program? These issues are important to consider as they impact on the professional support and their subsequent action.

14. What is the generalisability of the results?

Minor
reference 7 lacks a year
no date on reference 18

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