Reviewer's report

Title: How communication affects prescription decisions in consultations for acute illness in children: A systematic review and meta-ethnography.

Version: 2 Date: 20 February 2014

Reviewer: Linda Milnes

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this paper.

This paper addresses the rarely investigated triadic consultation in primary care between a parent, doctor and child by systematically reviewing existing qualitative research. The aim is to synthesize current literature specifically related to prescription decision making in consultations regarding acute illnesses such as respiratory tract infections. The main rationale for conducting this study seems to be to assess the relationship between communication within the consultation and over-prescription of antibiotics. The paper highlights the complexities of triadic communication and the consequences of misunderstandings as well as the low level of children’s participation.

The Checklist PRISMA for systematic reviews has been partially used to check the reporting of this review but it is recognised that some of the points are irrelevant due to this being a review of qualitative papers. The meta-ethnography approach is a suitable analysis method and this is clearly described leading to the identification of common themes across the papers. The tables clearly support the descriptions in the text and conclusions clearly supported by the data.

There are a few revisions that I think will strengthen this paper and I have listed them below.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The abstract needs to include the methods used to appraise qualitative papers and any limitations of the review, as per guidelines for reporting systematic reviews.
2. The conclusion in the abstract needs to be stronger with clear recommendations for practice or future research.
3. Is the review registered with PROSPERO? If so the ID number needs to be stated.
4. The first line of the background could be clearer and state the prevalence of consultations for acute illnesses.
5. I think that the discussion regarding over-prescription of antibiotics needs to include a reference to why this is a problem for the health service/patient/GP – at the moment it is presumed that the reader will know this.
6. Is TARGET an acronym? If so what is the full title.

7. Under ‘Methods’ it is stated that 'standard methods' are used – is it possible to support this statement with a reference?

8. Was a study protocol written for this review? If so, please could details of where it is available be included in the paper.

9. The literature search section is clear but there are some details that need to be added: the dates of coverage (years considered), the reason why the named journals were hand searched and any limitations that were used and a reason why quantitative data were excluded.

10. The data extraction was conducted independently adding to the reliability of this stage but more detail is needed on what strategy was used to conduct the extraction – were piloted forms used?

11. Page 7 refers to CA and DA which I presume are conversation and discourse analysis – these need writing in full before the abbreviation is used.

12. Page 9, third line down there is a typo ‘stylesindicated’

13. Page 12 second paragraph there are two full stops after ‘rare’.

14. The discussion mainly focuses on the communication between parent and doctor. However, the synthesis findings also highlighted that children’s voices were rare in consultations but that any contributions were meaningful and useful. This was an important finding that needs to be discussed within context of previous research regarding the low level of participation of children and young people in consultations and the implications of this for patient-centered care, children’s development of skills to consult and shared decision making.

15. The conclusion needs to be stronger with some clear and feasible recommendations for practice. For example the authors state that clinicians and parents need to communicate more explicitly – how do the authors propose parents could be supported do communicate more explicitly?

I hope you find these suggestions useful and I wish you all the best with publishing this review.

**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 do not have any competing interests.