Reviewer’s report

Title: Decision making around living and deceased donor kidney transplantation: a qualitative study exploring the importance of expected relationship changes

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Reviewer: Allison Tong

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. The authors conducted focus groups involving 47 deceased and living donor kidney transplant recipients and living donors to explore the motivations and decision making regarding accepting a kidney transplant. This is an important and interesting topic which potentially has important implications for the care of living kidney donors and transplant recipients.

The rationale for this study is that recipients may fear “possible relationship changes” which in turn could influence their decision to accept an offer of living kidney donation. The authors wish to investigate the reasons why recipients have opted for deceased donor kidney transplant, and the motivations to pursue kidney transplant from living vs deceased donors.

Discretionary revisions

Minor essential revisions

- Page 4, line 1: move “focus groups” to methods. All reference to methods and methodology should be in the methods section. Also, focus groups are not interviews. Delete “interviews” after focus groups.

Major compulsory revisions

- Can the authors clarify why participant selection was aimed to achieve a “representative” sample? What characteristics did the authors aims to capture and what was the rationale? I.e a range of clinical and demographic characteristics to obtain a breadth of views? Did the authors aim to achieve equal numbers across the three groups (donors, deceased donor transplant recipient, living donor transplant recipient)?

- The rationale of using focus groups is unclear. While they “provide in-depth information and explore cognitions and motivations of underlying behaviour,” focus groups are used when group interaction and dynamics (e.g. brainstorming, clarifying ideas, debate) would be useful for answering the research question. The appropriateness of the selected methodology for answering the research question is not compelling. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, why were focus groups used instead of individual interviews?

- Suggest to review: Barbour and Kitzinger, Developing Focus Group Research
- The focus group topics were based on a literature review. References would be useful.

- What is the purpose of the quantitative content analysis? I am not sure that frequency of comments on a specific topic is meaningful.

- Page 5 para 1 indicates that participants “disagreed” with answers. I would suggest a thematic analysis of the reasons underpinning such disagreements.

- Given the paucity of literature on this topic, why were themes or categories identified apriori? These predetermined themes may not capture the full scope of participant experiences and perspectives. The “number” of people mentioning a specific topic does not indicate the level of importance of the topic. What is useful is the meanings, beliefs, attitudes, underpinning through processes relating to the topic.

- Can the authors comment on the low response rate?

- The participant characteristics would be better retabulated into focus group composition. How many were in each focus group etc?

- Table 5 is perhaps the most informative and seems to be an output of some qualitative (thematic?) analysis? Quotations should be referenced (participant ID, or gender, age). I would recommend that the text follow a similar format – under similar headings which may need to be refined further. The way in which the text is currently written is difficult to follow and do not coherently capture the concepts identified. These “statement category” appear to be themes which the authors could elaborate on and discuss the differences between three groups. Then include more quotations in the table.

- Under results, again the quantification is inappropriate. First, qualitative research is used to explore meanings, beliefs and attitudes. It does not aim to quantify frequency (as this is not a good indicator of “importance” of a concept, and participants may simply have not raised the point if not prompted) and it is not used for measuring associations between variables. This is done with quantitative surveys.

- Did the authors use theoretical saturation? I.e continue recruiting participants from each of the three groups until subsequent groups/participants were not raising new major concepts?

- The focus group questions and sample of quotations provided in the paper demonstrate that you have collected potentially rich and important data. However, I recommend re-analysis (inductive thematic analysis).

- Concrete implications for future research and clinical practice/policy should be discussed.

Again, the authors address a very important and relevant issue in kidney transplantation. It appears that they have collected potentially rich data during the focus groups. However, there are some fundamental issues in methodology and methods (data collection/data analysis); including appropriateness of methods to the research questions, to be addressed.
**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'