Reviewer's report

Title: Communicating with parents about vaccination: guidelines for health professionals

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Reviewer: Nick Sevdalis

Reviewer's report:

The authors report a multi-stage development of guidelines for healthcare professionals regarding how to communicate with parents about vaccinating their children. Review of the evidence is followed by the development of the guidelines and some preliminary testing for face validity and usefulness.

The paper is very well written and addresses a very practical yet vexing question. It is certainly within the remit of the Journal and it should be of significant interest to its audience. In my view, the authors have done a great job going through the evidence base and distilling it into something that can be used to structure and format vaccination consultations, particularly the more difficult ones with vaccine refusers or even vaccine hesitant parents. The scenarios provided are also doing a very good job at illustrating the different behaviours (by parents and healthcare professionals) and practically demonstrating the content and application of the recommendations.

I do have some comments for the authors, which I think will make the paper stronger.

MAJOR REVISIONS

First of all, I think the work reported here should be referred to as “recommendations” rather than “guidelines”. In my view, a guideline would require a stronger evidence base that shows that the different communication styles and principles proposed by the authors are indeed effective (ie, they improve the 5 endpoints listed on page 5). At they stand, these recommendations are yet to be tested in this respect – hence my suggestion.

Secondly, and related to the point above, the Discussion of the paper needs expansion. There should be a section on limitations and “where next” – where I would expect the authors to mention prospective testing in real (or even experimental) consultations to further validate their recommendations and establish their effectiveness in relation to the endpoints that they propose. There should also be a comment on the rather slim evidence base that was found (see also point below). 2-3 paragraphs should probably be enough to cover these points.

Thirdly, I was rather surprised that the authors only ended up with 3 studies that report parental positions and communication strategies. My area of expertise is
MMR, and I am aware of multiple papers that deal with parents’ concerns etc – including the problems that they may have with the healthcare professionals’ communication styles (eg, dismissive) etc. Could the authors comments/explain why the evidence base they identified is so small in their response letter? This is also something that deserves comment in the Discussion – there has been so much written about vaccination acceptance/refusal and yet there is so little evidence to support the development of a recommendation – how should we go about resolving this gap?

MINOR REVISIONS

On page 6, more detail is required on the 104 healthcare professionals who reviewed the guidelines – please provide some demographic information as well as their level of expertise.

**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