Title: "I am pregnant and my husband has diabetes. Is there a risk for the foetus?" A qualitative study of questions asked by email about the role of genetic susceptibility to diabetes. Or (see cover letter): "My uncle has diabetes. Is it possible this disease is inheritable for my future child?" A qualitative study of questions asked by email about the role of genetic susceptibility to diabetes. In case a title without a quotation is preferred: "Patients and family members inquiring the role of genetic susceptibility to diabetes. A qualitative study of questions asked by email".

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Version: 3 Date: 5 November 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear members of the Editorial Team,

Hereby we send the latest revision of our manuscript, entitled “I am pregnant and my husband has diabetes. Is there a risk for the foetus?” A qualitative study of questions asked by email about the role of genetic susceptibility to diabetes.

As indicated in the previous cover letter, we will leave it to the decision of the Editorial Team whether a quotation in the title is preferred. On second thought, we can imagine that mentioning ‘pregnancy’ in the title might narrow the expectations or misinform the readers of *BMC public health* about the theme of the paper. A more neutral quotation might be:

“My uncle has diabetes. Is it possible this disease is inheritable for my future child?” A qualitative study of questions asked by email about the role of genetic susceptibility to diabetes.

In case a title without a quotation is preferred, we suggest:

“Patients and family members inquiring the role of genetic susceptibility to diabetes. A qualitative study of questions asked by email”.

Please find below the responses to the reviewers’ final comments.

On behalf of the authors,
Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Suzanne C.M. van Esch, MA

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REVIEWER’S COMMENTS

Reviewer: David Whitford

Reviewer's report:
I am happy that the authors have adequately addressed my previous comments. There are still a few spelling mistakes in the text.

We checked the document for spelling mistakes and made some linguistic corrections.
Reviewer: Susan Sullivan-Bolyai

Reviewer's report:

*Pg 6: clarify expert in the field: are a variety of experts used: are they always physicians or do you have genetics experts involved, or depending on who is on call? This information would be important for countries and/or universities who want to develop similar online sites?

In the revised manuscript, we inform the reader in more detail about the process of answering emailed questions:

“Three staff members, who are all educated in genetics and inheritance, answer the questions within three days. This helpdesk team refers to professionals in the field (e.g. clinical genetic centers, diabetes specialists or general practitioners) in case they are unable to answer the question.”

*Pg 6: Did Medical Ethical Committee of VUMC determine study was non-invasive and provided a waiver? I would say just that to make it very clear. Next sentence needs more clarification: maybe something like 'Throughout the study the subjects' confidentiality was respected...and explain how with using deidentified demographic data etc...

It was not the Medical Ethical Committee that determined the study was non-invasive. In Dutch law, researchers are not obliged to submit their proposal for medical ethical approval when “their study population is not subjected to treatment or is required to behave in a certain manner”. We followed the Dutch Code of Conduct for Medical Research wherein a specific code for adequate secondary use of data is defined. Among other things, this code stresses the importance to follow the “Act on the Protection of Personal Data”.

We agree with the reviewer that the original phrase may not be clear enough. Therefore, we rephrased the comment about ethical approval as follows:

“In view of the observational and non-invasive nature, this study is not subject to the Dutch Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act. The researchers followed the rules defined in the Dutch Code of Conduct for Medical Research, in which a specific code for adequate secondary use of data is defined.”

Information on how subjects’ confidentiality was respected is described in the Study Sample section:

“The National Genetic Research and Information Center assigned an identification number (#) to each email. The researchers received the emails without name and email address, to protect confidentiality of participants.”

and in the Data Analysis section:

“Illustrative quotes are presented as summaries of the questions’ quintessence, paraphrasing the original Dutch formulation as much as possible (however, sometimes with minor alteration to respect subjects’ confidentiality).”
*Pg 6: A list with identification (remove s) numbers.
The ‘s’ has been removed.

*Pg 7: I would cut out discussion of 'Grounded theory' in data analysis section and just refer to it as qualitative content analysis; you can refer to constant comparison of data but it may confuse the readers to see GT here since you are not describing a process.
*Same page: In this study we adopted an iterative and inductive approach throughout the data analysis process

We acknowledge the reviewer's concern. In the revised manuscript we expanded on the used method on request of the first reviewer and mentioned “Grounded Theory” to emphasise the fact that we did not use classical content analyses. Actually, we meant to indicate that we followed the principles of Grounded Theory (emerging themes and tendencies were identified and categorised). Indeed we did not build a ‘theory’. We agree with the reviewer that just describing the process will do and revised the paragraph accordingly:

“The two researchers (SvE and research assistant) double-coded all email questions using qualitative data indexing software (Kwalitan 5.0[25]). Emerging themes and tendencies were identified and categorised; ambiguities were resolved and categories were reduced to major themes in discussion with two senior researchers and re-reading the emails[26].

The second comment referring to Grounded Theory (“The researchers reckon with the fact that secondary content analysis may impede the guidelines of Grounded Theory regarding ongoing data generation and the saturation principle.”) is omitted.

*Pg 8 et al.: for consistency, put n before or after each %, you did this with some but not with all %s; same with table 1 & 2 for each demographic or topic: include n with %.

We agree with the reviewer that Table 1 & 2 have become more informative by adding frequencies.
As requested, we also added frequencies with each mentioned percentage in the Results section.