Reviewer's report

Title: Public views of the UK media and government reaction to the 2009 swine flu pandemic

Version: 1 Date: 5 October 2010

Reviewer: S. Michelle Driedger

Reviewer's report:

The authors present a qualitative analysis from 14 focus groups, including 61 women and 12 men, from Scotland. Focus group discussions concentrated on participant perceptions from the images of swine flu, to information sources and the credibility of those sources, as well as participant assessment of swine flu risk for themselves and those around them. The authors provide a great deal of methodological detail about how participants were recruited, how data were collected and analyzed thematically, as well as information concerning research ethics approval to carry out the study. In essence, the authors have provided readers with ample information to assess the rigour in which the study was carried out and analyzed in order to have confidence in the credibility of the information presented. The article was written in plain language making it accessible to a wide audience, while drawing the appropriate links between this study and other published literature. This article will make a contribution to the literature by capturing public perceptions of swine flu in Scotland that will add to a broader understanding of public perceptions surrounding pandemic H1N1 when compared to other similar studies that have already been published or will be published in the future.

In deciding on the "Level of Interest" - I was torn between "an article of importance in its field" and the category I ultimately decided on. I think the article is strong and presents important information that should be of value to anyone within the health system - from policy makers to practitioners/clinicians dealing with people - because there have been too many problems with how pandemic H1N1 has been communicated at a global level. From the data presented in the article, the UK has not managed to distinguish itself apart from communications challenges experienced in Canada, the United States, and perhaps elsewhere in Europe. I leave it to the editors to make the decision as to how they want to proceed about recommending the best journal fit for BMC.

Some minor revisions I would suggest to the authors; some of these are typographical, others are discretionary.

Discretionary

I wonder if authors have given any thought to the implications for the results based on their study population - almost a ratio of 5:1 for women to men. It might be worth thinking about for the discussion/conclusion, or at least recognizing the limitations of the sample population as compared to gender distributions for the
Discussion section, first paragraph, last sentence: I would delete this sentence. It is an apologist "justification" for why a qualitative approach was best for this study design. It isn't needed. The authors chose the most appropriate design for the research objectives. Apologies are not required.

Discussion section, following paragraph: "These concerns lessened over the summer when a wave of swing flu cases meant that increasing numbers of people gained direct experience". This is very awkward wording. I would suggest that authors rephrase it. I believe they are saying that people became less concerned as their familiarity with the risk increased, but the text isn't very clear. If my assessment of what they are saying is incorrect, then they really need to work on their meaning in that sentence better.

Minor revisions/typographical:
Discussion section, 2nd page, following citation 31. "conforms" should read "confirms".
Following page - sentence "identified for immunisation" ends in both a comma and a period.
Conclusion paragraph, second sentence there are two periods at the end.

**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.