Reviewer's report

Title: The ongoing impacts of hepatitis C infection: a systematic review of the literature

Version: 3 Date: 20 July 2012

Reviewer: Magdalena Harris

Reviewer's report:

This article has benefited from revision and I would like to thank the authors for their comprehensive response letter. I feel however, that further revision would result in a stronger article.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The rationale and objectives of the article now sit better with its format. One reason for this is the clarification regarding ‘psychosocial’ instead of social – the latter speaking to a broader remit which is not covered here. I would recommend changing ‘social’ to ‘psychosocial’ in the methods section of the abstract for congruence and clarity. Also in the heading on page 11.

2. I am still unsure regarding the sensitivity of the search strategy. I know this sounds overly pedantic, but I quickly identified a number of articles not included in your additional file that are within your timeframe and appear to come within your remit. These are included below for your interest only. So – my suggestion here is at least to think about revisiting your use of the word ‘sensitive’ in regard to the search strategy – ie on page 4 and page 17 (at least revisit ‘highly sensitive’)

3. Page 14: this sentence ‘feelings of hopelessness ... relative to HIV infection’ requires revision. As it stands it is unclear and I am not sure what you are trying to say.

4. The ‘psychosocial experiences’ section (p 13 – 15) has been improved with referencing, but would be further improved with the removal of definitive statements (as they preclude any acknowledgement of variance). For example, the statement ‘diagnosis with HCV appeared to have profound impacts on social functioning’ – this is reported for the majority of cases but as you acknowledge on the following page is not the case for all. Again, in relation to the statement ‘infection with HCV had substantial impacts of health and well being ...’ this is also not the case for all. There is a need to moderate/contextualise these definitive statements – for example by adding in ‘a number of studies have found’ ... ‘many research participants report ...’ etc.

5. As in the point above, the following sentence (‘perceived stigma and discrimination impeded adaptation to HCV diagnosis’) implies this is the case for ALL people with HCV whereas research has found that for some a diagnosis is
not experienced as disruptive. These statements, including those in the following sentences, are reported as definitive whereas the findings are from discrete research studies – and a wide variance reported in people’s reactions and experiences of diagnosis and living with HCV. I encourage a more nuanced reading for this section.

6. I realise that you wish to limit your reference list, but providing more references to back up statements in the psycho-social section would strengthen your article. It still feels under referenced, for example references for the de-prioritisation of HCV by PWID (middle para, pg14), after ‘several authors’ (last para pg 14) and at the next sentence after ‘factors’.

7. I would encourage revising the sentence ‘the perception of stigma is generally an internalised phenomenon’ – if you are referring to both felt and experienced stigma here, surely perceptions of stigma can arise from tangible experiences of discrimination?

8. There is no ‘et al’, for the Harris reference (page 15)

9. The discussion feels a bit thin – it would be helpful here to refer back to the National Strategies addressed in the introduction – how might these findings help inform the strategies.

10. The article (ie page 5) and authors’ letter refer to the narrative synthesis of their material. The final line of the conclusion refers to ‘this narrative review’. In this light, it would be appropriate to refer to the review in the title as a narrative review or to omit the word systematic.

References


Hepatitis C: Fact or Fiction? Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings, 10(4), 267-271.


**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 have no competing interests to declare