Reviewer's report

Title: Patients' views on responsibility for the management of musculoskeletal disorders - a qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 17 May 2009

Reviewer: Roni Evans

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Overall, I feel this is a well-conducted qualitative study that merits publication. I believe the quality of the manuscript would be improved by paying particular attention to items 2, 3, 6, and 9 below. I would consider these Minor Essential Revisions. The following summarizes my review.

1. The authors have done a good job in clearly stating the specific aims of their work.

2. The qualitative methods described are well-suited for meeting the objectives. The authors have described important relevant population characteristics (e.g. mean age); however, I strongly suggest moving this information to the results section. It would also be helpful to provide similar data regarding the types of musculoskeletal conditions participants had (e.g. what percent had low back pain, knee pain, etc), duration of condition, etc..

3. The data appear sound. I especially appreciate the inclusion of the appendix which nicely illustrates how data were coded and interpreted. Personally, it looks to me like the category “ambiguity of responsibility” might be better termed “barriers to responsibility” which seems more recognizable to me based on the description of results. I found Table 1 a bit confusing at first; is it demonstrating the number of times each individual mentioned a code? If so, this needs to be more clearly delineated. Also, I think it would be useful to display (or at least describe in results section) the number of individuals who expressed each code. Currently, the results section is described in such a way that leaves the impression that all codes were equally represented.

4. The authors have adhered to standards of reporting for qualitative data. I especially appreciate the acknowledgement for professional bias influencing interpretation.

5. The discussion and conclusions appear appropriate.

6. Most of the limitations of the work have been adequately addressed. I do recommend that the authors address the issue of generalizability. Since this study was performed in Sweden, the potential differences in healthcare systems among different countries should be acknowledged (i.e. it is quite possible that patients in other countries may feel differently). Related to this, I believe some discussion on the context of the study (socialized healthcare system) is warranted, as it likely influences the study results. Would participants in the U.S. expect society to bear the same degree of responsibility? I believe such
discussion would be interesting and relevant for the journal readership. There is also the issue of whether or not a sample of 20 participants can provide knowledge that is generalizable; this should be addressed as a potential limitation.

7. The authors have clearly acknowledged previous work.

8. The title and abstract are appropriate.

9. I feel that this is an interesting and important manuscript that warrants publication. However, I do find the writing style (grammatically speaking) to be a bit awkward which detracts from the authors’ good work. I strongly recommend that this manuscript be edited by an individual other than the authors. I also recommend that attention be paid in the results section for consistency in presentation. Some areas begin with “the informants described” and “for some informants it is…” (which I prefer) and then move to “it is your own responsibility…”. I find this distracting. Personally I would like to see the authors change such language to more clearly reflect that nature of the study: i.e. “participants described they felt it was their responsibility…”. I believe this can be easily resolved.

A couple of other minor points: The authors refer to “society” but is unclear to me who the authors are referring to (the social health care system?). If so, it then becomes even more important to address issues I outlined in item 6 above. It is also unclear to me which professions the author includes as “medical”. Perhaps it is best to just name the professions and not group them so that they are more readily recognized across countries.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.