**Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Divided By A Lack Of Common Language ? - A Qualitative Study Exploring The Use Of Language By Health Professionals Treating Back Pain.

**Version:** 4  **Date:** 19 July 2009

**Reviewer:** Chris G Maher

**Reviewer's report:**

In my view this study is fundamentally flawed and should not be published. In my earlier reviews I asked for a more focussed manuscript to allow for more depth but the authors have ignored this request. Having reviewed their methods more closely this time I can see why they could not follow my suggestion: there probably is no depth here.

The problem is that the authors held one hour focus groups with 8 participants and asked the participants to consider 37 medical terms. This means each participant had at most ~12 seconds for each term if that was the only task in the focus group. But it was not. They also had another 5-6 tasks to complete in the one hour. And I have not counted the time taken by the researcher within this one hour period. This schedule is completely unrealistic and would not allow the participants sufficient time to contribute meaningfully. Each participant is being given a few seconds on each issue at best.

I am not an experienced qualitative researcher but in my one publication in this area we held two hour focus groups to explore a single construct "recovery from low back pain". We had a total of 36 participants in 8 focus groups ie 4-5 per group. This structure was advised by my colleagues on the paper who are qualitative researchers. Having been part of the study I can see that you really do need a lot of time to give all participants a chance to offer their perspective.

Reference


**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**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'