Reviewer's report

Title: What are the important components of the clinical assessment of hand problems in older adults in primary care? Results of a Delphi study.

Version: 1 Date: 20 April 2010

Reviewer: Tara Cusack

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General Comments
This is an interesting clinically based qualitative study which has been conducted to establish the most appropriate hand assessment based on a Delphi survey of clinical experts in the area. The paper culminates with a series of prioritised questions and assessments. While these assessments will require further evaluation the paper is useful and informative.

Major revisions
• Abstract
Conclusions: Since this is the conclusion of the study itself I would have expected the authors to address their conclusions to the objective of the study that is ‘to identify questions and assessments regarded by health care practitioners as important’ rather then to the methodology by which this was achieved.

• Background
Why did the authors specifically target ‘clinical assessment of hand problems in older adults’ in a primary care setting specifically? Has this work already been undertaken in terms of establishing an evaluation process in secondary care?

In terms of the specific aim of the project was it envisaged that once ‘a hand assessment tool’ was established that it could be used by any of the health professionals involved in the care of the patient?

• Methods
If the intention was to formulate an evaluation protocol for older individuals with hand problems who were attending primary care why did the authors look for consensus among clinicians, researchers and educators that were not necessarily directly involved in the delivery of front line care?

In terms of the development of the Delphi survey particular broad headings were chosen, what was the basis for choosing these particular headings, were they based upon the literature?

Round 2: What was the basis for using 'a nine-point numerical rating scale' and
the descriptors? Has this means of eliciting consensus been used previously in the literature?

• Discussion
Paragraph 2 Were the GAS, REMS ad the Southampton examination examined during the development of the framework?

Could the sample size be a limitation in this study?

‘Further work….’ Would further work not be the evaluation of the results of this study, that is the value or otherwise of the questions and assessments identified? I was unsure why further work would be the examination of the influence of professional background on consensus studies.

Minor revisions

• Background
I am unsure whether ‘e.g’ is an acceptable abbreviation.
Line 17 ‘To try and address’ I think I would make this more positive ‘In order to address the lack of literature in this area…..’

• Participants and Methods
Line 7 ‘ A convenience sample of …..was identified……’
Line 11 ‘A convenience sample of consultant…..was identified….’

Maybe the authors might define what they meant by ‘To make the study manageable…..’

• Methods
In the final sentence ‘Three case scenarios were constructed……and formed the basis for all three rounds of the Delphi survey’.

Figures 1, 2 , 3. These are the clinical scenarios, these would need to be incorporated into a figure format. I believe the hand symptom diagrams should be incorporated into the figure with the appropriate scenario.

The authors discuss the development of ‘a structured framework’ more information pertaining to the development of this framework would assist the reader.

Round 1: Final sentence ‘….they would include that had not already been addressed in the main case scenario.’

•Analysis
Did the authors use a frame work for the analysis of the data generated in round 1?

The ‘decision rule’ referred to in the analysis and results, is this supported in the
literature?

• Discussion

Paragraph 2 sentence 1 ‘many sources of expert advice and guidance on the clinical assessment of musculoskeletal conditions’ include a few references to support this.

Paragraph 2 final sentence ‘….examinations agreed by the Delphi ……appears to be targeted…..’

Paragraph 3 Second last sentence ‘This may be due to a genuine…..’
Final sentence ‘….time constraints and lack’

**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 I have no competing interests