Reviewer's report

Title: Unstated factors in orthopaedic decision-making: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 27 May 2010

Reviewer: Jerrilyn Cambron

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

1. The authors did not include how they decided that six physicians and 26 patients was enough for data saturation. Was this number determined ahead of time? Was it based on a time frame?

2. Did the patients receive compensation for participation?

3. Lifestyle factors included ‘family life’ however this was not fully discussed and no examples were given for this factor.

4. In the section on patients’ view of physicians that were approachable, understandable, and information, the second quote by Mr. Brown did not seem to fit. Mr. Brown describes Surgeon A as ‘a bit quick’ and he thought the surgeon would have spent more time with him.

5. The final statement in the results section states that patients were more likely to refer to the explicit factors than the implicit factors. However, the implicit (non-verbal) factors expressed by the physicians (patient looks tired or terrified) were not shared with the patient. So, it seems obvious that if the patients did not know these factors then they could not refer to them.

6. The discussion section states ‘However, the researcher was able to evaluate whether reported behavior matched actual behavior during the observed consultations.’ Was there any examples of a mismatch in reported versus observed behaviors?

Minor essential revisions

1. Please include in the text the age and years of experience of the clinicians. The discussion states that ‘There was also good distribution across age and experience for the clinicians’ but this was not defined in the article.

2. Twice in the text Mr. Lloyd was described as being 87, yet Table 2 indicated that he was 86.

3. When describing the confidence of the clinician, there was a quote by Mr. Morris regarding Surgeon A, however the quote ended by saying that he was ‘listed for TJR by ESP2’ rather than Surgeon A. Table 2 also noted that Mr. Morris was seen by ESP2.

4. Why did the authors skip over the letter C in choosing physician identifiers?

Discretionary revisions
1. Because the abstract states that the interviewer used a semi-structured interview, you may consider including the questions asked to all physicians, particularly because there were two interviewers in this study.

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.