Reviewer’s report

Title: Life impact of ankle fractures: Qualitative analysis of patient and clinician experiences

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Reviewer: Tom Sanders

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Life impact of ankle fractures: qualitative analysis of patient and clinician experiences

Minor Essential Revisions:

Thank you for the revisions to your manuscript which I have read with interest. The authors have made substantial changes to the introduction, methods and discussion, which has certainly improved the manuscript and added to the clarity of the methods in particular. Consequently, I think the manuscript is much improved and offers a new addition to the literature on ankle fractures. Having said that, I still think that the results are descriptive, even though the authors have provided more interpretation to support the quotations. What I am trying to say is that the findings still do not read like they are telling the reader an awful lot that is new or insightful. After all, financial problems (generally), as well as physical and social issues impact on many patients with many other chronic pain conditions or injuries. So, I was hoping that they would say a little more from the analysis that moves beyond these, what appear to me, to be generic themes. I appreciate that the authors did not aim to conduct a purely exploratory study adopting a ‘grounded theory’ approach to data collection and analysis. So perhaps this is the one area that has led to some confusion, and may arise after publication when disseminated to a wider audience of researchers, practitioners and academics may lead to the same question – namely what is new here. However, I do think the paper has a contribution to make, not as a ‘stand-alone’ qualitative piece of research seeking to uncover ‘new ground’, but from the perspective of a good piece of qualitative research whose primary aim is to develop a patient reported outcome measure in relation to ankle fractures. The authors have of course clearly stated that this was the primary motivation for conducting the study, but given the confusion (from me) about how this study/paper should be judged, I would ask the authors to write a short paragraph describing such an outcome measure, what specifically it will aim to achieve and the purpose to which it will be put. This should go probably in the methods, but the issue of how it will be utilised in practice and by whom (etc) needs to be revisited at the end in the Discussion, to provide a clear link between the qualitative findings, the development of the measure and the practical implications. And finally, how the findings from this study will be used to develop and inform such a measure. Will it be used by clinicians during consultations with patients, which clinicians, and which sector of health provision (primary or
secondary care, and why)? If the authors were able to make this one last change then I think the manuscript would make a lot more sense to the readership, and sit comfortably in the context that it was a developmental piece of qualitative research with a clear aim. Following such an addition, I think the manuscript will be much more appropriate for publication.

Finally, on a moot point, in relation to making recommendations on the basis of the study findings, it seems to me that the authors hesitate to make any specific recommendations about patient management from their findings on the basis that there is a scarcity of clinical trials investigating the efficacy of rehabilitation protocols for ankle fractures. I am unclear why recommendations cannot be made on the basis of their data. Such recommendations do not have to be formal policies, but simple suggestions for improving patient care. One obvious area that the authors could comment on is the discordance between patient and professional expectations about recovery from ankle injuries. There may be some suggestions that the authors might provide to assist clinicians to offer advice and information about the pathway to recovery or the likely clinical pattern of rehabilitation from ankle injuries.

I would like to thank the authors for working hard to improve this manuscript, and I look forward to seeing it in print.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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'