Reviewer's report

Title: Developing an online learning community for mental health professionals and service users: a discourse analysis

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Reviewer: Michelle O'Reilly

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This paper reports that the internet has played a significant role in our understanding of the role of ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’ and while patients and students tend to have extensive experience of using the internet, clinical professionals may have reservations about online interaction. Nonetheless as society becomes more reliant on online resources health care professionals need to understand more about technology. Using data from three week long collaborative learning courses the authors used discourse analysis to report that mental health professionals and service users were able to discuss the issues together and typically drew on medical discourses or lived experiences to shift between positions. They found that anonymity was central to success in online learning although this did not eliminate the asymmetries between teacher and learner, professional and service user.

I believe that this is an interesting paper that is likely to be of benefit to academics and practitioners. The writing style is competent and the focus worthy of attention. There are some areas of the paper that would benefit from further scrutiny:

Major compulsory revisions

• “The need for healthcare professionals to understand these technologies is vital” P3, seems like a randomly placed sentence amongst the information about how patients come by health information. You need to contextualise the sentence in with your argument and you need to show why it is vital. Is it so they can vet the quality of the information that patients are downloading, so they can add to the information, to understand the patient better, or others?

• Is internet usage more common for some health conditions or all health conditions? Is it related more to physical health, life-threatening conditions or mental health conditions? Is there an issue of stigma, privacy etc?

• When discussing SharpTalk you do not really show why it matters that the healthcare professionals failed to engage in the forums. What would they add to it? Could their engagement potentially put young self harmers off from contributing? The presence of a teacher in an online distance learning environment may constrain the student responses so a healthcare professional may inhibit the child’s responses? I think you need to do more to justify the position you are taking.
There is considerable discourse/conversation literature on doctor patient communication and asymmetry etc available that you haven’t really looked at here. While I am not suggesting you get distracted from your general argument it might be useful to look at people like Maynard, Heath, Heritage and so forth, and in relation to the use of video. This will then help you think about how online communication is different.

When you say Mental health professionals, what type of professionals are they? Primary mental health workers? Occupational therapists? nurses? Psychologists? Psychiatrists? These titles may contribute to the hierarchy as may the title Doctor etc.

The fact that the recruited MHPs were interested in learning about internet methods makes the sampling a little biased.

You say you use discourse analysis but you do not provide any detail as to which form and this will make a difference to your findings and how they are presented. Is it critical discourse analysis, Foucauldian Discourse analysis, discourse analysis as presented by Potter and Wetherell, discourse analysis informed by a conversation analytic framework, discursive psychology? You need to be clear and you need to reference.

The paper would benefit from more methodological information and a rationale for choices.

You may find it useful to read more about clinical openings, and telephone helpline openings, to develop your analysis on internet chat openings, this paper could usefully add to that literature, particularly in terms of role talk, and category entitlements etc.

It is difficult to comment on the quality of the analysis as it is not really clear which form of discourse analysis is being used here and which epistemology informs it but the messages are clear. It would benefit from engaging more with the terminology of the particular approach being used. It may also be useful to use some of the discourse literature to facilitate your analysis as there are some relevant discourse devices being used. There is also some useful literature on discourse analysis of text, which to a degree this is.

You talk quite a lot about categories and roles and you may find Sack’s work on categories useful.

There doesn’t seem to be a clear conclusion to the paper.

Minor essential revisions

“The premise (from previous studies) was that having a scheduled event might help structure and encourage attendance” P 4 – what previous studies?

More clarity around what constitutes synchronous and asynchronous discussions may be useful in this context.

Avoid using abbreviations such as e.g., instead use the full, for example.

Discretionary revisions.
• Is it possible that age and gender are relevant to internet usage? Is there any literature that says that men use the internet more or younger generations do? Is this something that may affect your study? Something to consider rather than a definitive request for a change to your paper

• It maybe a journal style, but typically they are not called results, they are called analysis or findings, worth checking with the editor

On the whole there are some interesting and new messages in this paper that could potentially add to the evidence base. The authors need to address the literature more, however, and need to develop the rationale for the basic premise of the paper more. In places the argument lacks clarity and the discussion could be stronger and more directly relevant. Some of the limitations of the paper need to be highlighted, such as the self selection of the participants and the issue that MHPs who resist the internet have not been reached.

**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'