Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Technology assessment and resource allocation for predictive genetic testing: A study of the perspectives of Canadian genetic health care providers

**Version:** 3  **Date:** 3 March 2009

**Reviewer:** Jürgen Barth

**Reviewer’s report:**

The authors addressed some essential points and the manuscript has improved. However, some questions remain regarding the research focus of the study. I am not sure if these questions can be addressed in a revision, since the study and the interviews are already done. But the description of the results could be improved to provide clearer view concerning one specific aim. In a revision the authors should try to separate the background, methods, results and conclusions in a clearer way. Sometimes those are mixed up, which makes the manuscript hard to read.

**Major points**

1) I am not sure whether the first paragraph on page 5 is really necessary. Information on the research methods used is given in more detail in the methods section. I would suggest checking for double information and shorten this paragraph. However, the research question should be kept in this paragraph and could be extended (if some space is left).

2) I have still some problems with the focus of the study. Was there really a scientific research question? What was this research question? What was already known on this topic beforehand?

3) Within the manuscript the focus of the study is changing somehow and some parts of the manuscript are really unexpected. I try to give you some examples on this problem.

The heading of the manuscript is: Technology assessment and resource allocation for predictive genetic testing: A study of the perspectives of Canadian genetic health care providers

This might lead the reader to the research topic “resources allocation”. However the study itself is much broader. In the background section some information about the system of predictive genetic testing in Canada is given. The key sentence on resource allocation remains rather vague and it is not clear to me what is meant within these lines:

“It also faces the practical challenges of generating and incorporating robust evidence into health care resource allocations [6], finding the appropriate balance between quantitative and qualitative information [7], and setting uniform evaluation standards across highly variable testing and health outcomes [6].”
Some important questions remain from this sentence: I think it is impossible to have robust evidence for health care resource allocation decisions. What is meant with quantitative and qualitative information? How can uniform standards be used when the genetic testing procedures vary that much? How is this paragraph related to the topic “resource allocation”?

No research question is emerging from the introduction. It would be extremely helpful for the reader to get this information in the final paragraph of the introduction. Maybe the information of the first sentence of the method section could be used here. Please focus on the topic “resource allocation” again.

In the background section nothing is written on “associated legal, ethical, and social issues” which are mentioned in the method section and are used in the results section for structuring the empirical findings. It is not clear to me why these results were presented since the heading of the manuscript does not focus on this. The link of ethical and social aspects with the major topic of this paper (resource allocation) is not given at all. So far the link is suggested in one sentence:

“The study also focused on the relationship between resource allocation and the legal and ethical duties of care owed by health care providers involved in the provision of genetic services in the context of resource allocation policies [4,6,16].”

The introducing paragraph should either strengthen this relationship or an additional paragraph in the background section should introduce it. Moreover, I am not convinced that this relationship was part of the project. The questions used in the interview does not refer to any relationship issues:

“Assuming patient consent, who makes the decision about whether a predictive genetic test will be done?”

“When should a patient’s desire to have a specific test overrule the clinical indication for the test?”

Respondents were asked to rate the influence of patients’ concern about genetic discrimination, impact on family members, ability to obtain insurance, and additional costs associated with a positive result, on decisions regarding testing. All of those three points do not give any information on the relationship of resource allocation and social, legal and ethical issues. The authors should comment on this.

4) I am not convinced that asking persons involved in a specific kind of treatment is a research method that can lead to meaningful results.

For example, if you ask a cardiologist he will say that more money should be spent to this field of patient care. And a psychiatrist is asking as well for more money if this would be available. This is true for all professions and I therefore really doubt the scientific value of the interviews. The conclusion on page 16: “more test should receive funding” can be expected just by thinking about the expected perspective of persons involved in this kind of work. The more
important question “what kind of tests should be funded and which should be no longer provided” was not asked. The authors should face that there is a limited number of resources available which is neglected in the study so far.

Minor points

The authors should adapt the e-mail address von RHL since he is now working for Genome Alberta (according to the response letter).

In one paragraph the authors make a statement which could be considered rather provocative:

“Health providers play a key role in decisions about the utilization of genetic technologies. “

What about individual decisions of clients, legal regulations on the clinical utilization of genetic testing? This proposition is not covered by any reference, empirical finding etc.

It is very unusual to begin the results section with a sentence which is related to a reference. This information can also be given in the background section.

Correct citation no 28.

**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