Reviewer's report

Title: Ethical Issues related to First Time Patient Encounters - reflected from the perspective of physiotherapists in private practice

Version: 1 Date: 27 May 2011

Reviewer: Lynley Anderson

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions:
1. In some places the writing is acceptable, however in many places this is a problem. In some parts of the paper the quality of written English creates confusion, and leaves the reader having to second-guess exactly what the authors mean.

One example: On page one it is not clear how competence is being used when referring to the patient. I imagine that private practice patients are competent in the sense of having the capacity to consent, but what is the meaning that is intended in the way it is used here?

2. The variation in the ethical awareness of the participants is an issue. Some participants were ethically aware, while others lacked the vocabulary and the skills required to articulate ethical concerns. With such widely disparate groups it does pose some problems when drawing conclusions. The authors identify this. However, this raises questions about the level of ethics training physiotherapists get within their undergraduate education in Denmark. Many other countries have well-established ethics education within the undergraduate curriculum and it is surprising that this is not the case in Denmark. And although there is a brief comment about this, I would like to see the authors develop this a little more explicitly in the current article. What is the extent of ethics training in physiotherapy schools in Denmark?

3. Related to the above point about the varying ability of the participants to reflect on the ethical issues, I would like the authors to be more explicit about the difficulties this posed for the study.

4. The section on ‘some patients do not fit private practice’ raised some important issues. When talking about obese patients, one participant says, ‘[I do] have difficulties encountering them with respect’, and that they ‘find it disgusting! I can’t respect them and ask stupid questions. Isn’t that an ethical issue?’ This rather surprising response should have been more explicitly considered in the discussion section.

Minor essential revisions:
5. There are a number of further typographical and grammatical errors (generally these are caused by the incorrect use of a word). These errors will undoubtedly
be tidied up when the authors get appropriate assistance from an English speaking editor.

6. The title should indicate that this study was carried out in Denmark (see generalisability issue below).

7. The generalizability or transferability of the findings from qualitative research is an issue. Clearly there are differences in the training received by physiotherapists across the world and in the social and cultural contexts in which the practice of physiotherapy occurs. Therefore a similar study carried out in another country may raise very different responses. There are limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings of this study, and the authors do need to be thoughtful about this.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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