Reviewer's report

Title: Factors Affecting Information Use by General Pediatricians in Office Settings: A Grounded Theory Study

Version: 1 Date: 5 May 2005

Reviewer: Jocelyn Lockyer

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors have adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in a research context of 20 pediatricians. There are aspects of qualitative design that I would have anticipated in a qualitative study design that I did not see described in methods including ensuring data integrity and dependability and resolution of data coding conflicts. Similarly, with a small group of 20, I would not have anticipated the researchers would have conducted a multivariate analysis as it is inappropriate given the number of participants.

The study would have been strengthened by
a) using only a qualitative approach with minimal quantitative data. With a group of 20, the presentation of descriptive data (numbers only, no progression to multivariate analyses) would be appropriate.
b) clearer presentation of the qualitative methods including ensuring data integrity.
c) re-thinking the discussion section. There is content in the discussion that should have appeared in the background and/or results. The results section should have focussed on explaining the key findings in conjunction with the literature. For example, I would have anticipated that most of the content related to 'studying information behaviors' would have already been presented in the background or methods section.
d) re-thinking the section on weaknesses. In qualitative work, one tries to understand phenomenon not to count things or ensure generalizability. Sample size is important only in so far as you have sufficient people to provide information about the phenomenon and reach data saturation (ie, no further information or themes are coming out with successive interviews). Similarly, qualitative researchers would not worry about unspecified local variations as generalizability to other settings is not important. It is up to the end user (reader) to determine whether any part of the study (method, population, results) are transferable to other settings and situations.

For an approach to writing qualitative research for publication, I would suggest reading Luc Ct and Jean Turgeon, Appraising qualitative research articles in medicine and medical education, Medical Teacher, Issue: Volume 27, Number 1 / January 2005 Pages: 71 - 75 This article will provide a perspective on what reviewers look for in reviewing qualitative research submissions.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
A major revision would be required. I believe the data is there to re-write the paper. However, attention needs to be paid to the appropriate construction of a qualitative research article.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the
author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.