Reviewer's report

Title: Medical communication and technology: A video-based process study of the use of decision aids in primary care

Version: 2 Date: 23 October 2006

Reviewer: Alicia O'Cathain

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a well written and interesting paper. The high standard is illustrated by the data limitation section where the authors clearly acknowledge some of the issues that worried me, particularly that approaches to decision-making are embedded in the individual as well as computers and that this could have been viewed as an RCT of three GPs.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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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)

1. Could you expand the results section of the abstract a bit? There were differences between the three interventions other than time taken and they should be summarised here.

2. The abstract is the part of the paper most people read. Is this really the conclusion you want people to draw? My conclusions were that these fancy decision aids do not seem to be promoting shared decision-making and in fact prolong the consultation.

3. The last paragraph of the methodology section was too jargon filled for me. I am not familiar with analysing videos and you could try to make it a little clearer for people like me.

4. Figure 1 did not upload correctly and I have not been able to look at it.

5. You use NS to denote 'not significant'. Please put in the p-value, particularly in the context of small numbers and low power.

6. There were lots of significant differences in the consultation content but I found it hard to engage with them. Is there a way of presenting them to make them more readable? Perhaps put the statistical test info into the table.

7. The first sentence in data limitations irked me: 'mix-method nature of the process study'. You can do mixed methods studies with large numbers in the quant component and small numbers in the qual component and not have the need to apologise for the size of any part of the study. Could you explain in more detail what the issue was here.

8. You say your findings do not generalise to the trial. Are you being a little too careful here? I would be quite happy to predict a null trial from these this work. If the trial was positive then I'd consider myself to have discrepant findings and want to explore this further.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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What next?: Accept after minor essential 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 that I have no competing interests'