Reviewer's report

Title: Identifying online information needs for a palliative care website: An action-research-inspired approach

Version: 1 Date: 28 February 2007

Reviewer: Ronda Hughes

Reviewer's report:

General

Why there is no disagreement that accurate information about palliative and end-of-life care information is not readily accessible for many clinicians, patients and lay caregivers, it is not clear whether this study truly addressed that concern, or mainly focused on refining a website that would have continued limited use.

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

Background
- Please define what were the global policy issues targeted by this project.

Methods
- Since it is possible to gather how many 'hits' there were to the website, stating that the response rate could not be determined is not acceptable and puts the significance of the findings in jeopardy.
- It is more important to state what types of questions were included in the survey then it is to say that the survey was written in HTML.
- Were the members of the 'working party' representative of the population that would be accessing the website for information? How were the members selected?
- What process was involved in selecting the information that would be posted on the website? Was the new information more evidence-based? Were systematic reviews included as evidence? What were the qualifications of the investigators to determine the quality of the evidence to be used?
- Were the study investigators qualified to conduct this study? Was an interdisciplinary research team used?

Results
- What questions(s) were not responded to on the survey? Any type of pattern?
- Seems that non-clinician use of the website was low. Do you know why?
- Seems like the website tried to accomplish too much...providing information vs. providing employment opportunities vs. course information. Wouldn't it be important to define the scope of the website, making it clear what would/would not be included?
- Did website users access palliative care information through other websites? If so, which ones, and what was/was not offered on those websites that users were seeking information about?
- For Table 1 & 2, the 3rd column is missing a heading. What is the sample size reflected in each table?

Discussion
- How did you get from Tables 1 & 2, the the list of gaps in this section? Are these listed by the frequency of identified gaps?
- The mention that the study took place over 3 years should appear in the methods section, and not the discussion section. Why did the study take that long?

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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)

Background
- Instead of 'carers', would be more appropriate to use 'caregivers'.

Following the list of references, there is Table 1: Evaluation of original website. It is unclear what the authors are trying to accomplish by presenting this table. Additionally, 2 pages later, there is another Table 1. The authors should be more careful in presenting pertinent information in their manuscript.
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 of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.