Reviewer’s report

Title: Supporting experiential learning in collaborative Web-based patient education

Version: 1 Date: 8 October 2008

Reviewer: Robert A Logan

Reviewer’s report:

Discretionary revisions

The initial decision regarding this manuscript is whether as a matter of policy BioMed Central Medical Informatics and Decision Making publishes a literature review, or emphasizes publishing original research. The manuscript is a literature review that sets up a future study, or it could be perceived as a proposal to initiate support for a study. But no study is presented here – there are no original data or findings (either quantitative or qualitative).

As a result, the first question is whether it is the journal’s policy to publish a manuscript that is not a comprehensive, original, research study. I leave this decision to the editors.

In my opinion, it may be appropriate to publish a literature review at times -- if research is needed within a subspecialty of consumer health informatics and a dearth of on-point literature precedes it. As a result, I strongly suggest the authors make a more compelling case why the topic addressed is comparatively unusual, extraordinary, or under explored and deserves a literature review to generate related research. I do not find this type of justification in the current manuscript.

Hence, I suggest the authors explain why introducing the topic addressed in this study is in-and-of-itself a contribution to the current research literature. If the authors can make a more compelling case for the latter, then, I suggest the editors consider publication of a revised manuscript. Assuming a decision to revise the manuscript, I make some suggestions below to assist the authors.

Major compulsory revisions

In order to help the authors make a case that the topic addressed in the manuscript is by-itself a contribution to the literature, I recommend the authors integrate more literature on health information seeking from the consumer health informatics literature and the growing literature on health literacy.

I suggest the authors explain if the cited developments in web-based collaborative patient education are distinctive from the current literature about interpersonal educational health information seeking on the web in the health literacy and consumer health informatics literature. Or, the authors could widen
the range of literature they cite and note the widespread interest within several sub-disciplines regarding collaborative web-based health patient education. Either approach could make a more compelling case for new research approaches that are grounded in more multidimensional and grounded theoretical frameworks. However, the authors need to make the case why the manuscript’s topic is so fresh that it merits a literature review on its own -- and defend the need for more multidimensional research approaches and theoretical frameworks.

For example, one of the potential contributions of this manuscript may be the theoretical framework (Kolb’s theory of experiential learning) the authors advance as a research strategy. Kolb’s theory may be a research framework that helps a researcher assess collaborative web-based patient education in a multidimensional manner. However, the authors do not detail the theory and do not take the time to explain its relative advantages and disadvantages in comparison with other, well known, conceptual frameworks about consumer health information seeking. Rhetorically, if the authors expect a reader to believe Kolb’s approach is significant, then, it should be explained and defended. For instance, why do the authors believe it is superior to multidimensional theories of consumer motivation and health information seeking within the health communication literature, such as the theory of reasoned action, the health belief model, and the extended parallel process model?

I hope the authors will make some of the suggested changes and resubmit the manuscript.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.