Reviewer's report

Title: Evidence-based health information from the users' perspective - a qualitative analysis

Version: 3 Date: 30 April 2013

Reviewer: Kate Hinds

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I think the area of study is of interest and has some practical implications. I was disappointed in the study however, as it did not seem to add a great deal to our understanding of user reaction to this type of information.

Major Compulsory revisions

1. All points in conclusion to be illustrated with a quote from the focus group data
2. Participants should be described in the main text
3. the information products should be described in the method section and the reasons for choosing these products should be given
4. Greater clarity to the aim of the research and the connection to the method and findings - particularly concerning the issue of 'expectation'.
5. More information about the conduct of the focus groups, with information about data storage, consent of participants and support for them to take part.
6. Revision of conclusions with greater explicit linkage between the findings and their practical implications

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

There is no specific question in the article but the authors do identify an aim in the abstract: ‘The aim of our study is to define the spectrum of consumers’ reaction patterns to written EBHI to get a deeper understanding of their expectations’.

I think the study does define the spectrum of reactions from consumers, but I don’t think it really addresses the issue of their expectations. I am not sure how the word ‘expectation’ is being used here. I imagined on reading the abstract that I would get an insight into what the consumers expected from the information – they were not asked about this. They were asked about what effect the information would have on subsequent behaviour – an interesting group of questions from their focus group schedule that I did not think was fully explored in their discussion session.

I would also want a better understanding of their ‘consumers’. There was a brief description of the people taking part in the exercise, but not much discussion about them. A large proportion suffered from a chronic illness, and many, particularly men, had had higher educational training. I wondered if these might
be particularly sophisticated users of this kind of information, and therefore the most likely to use it. The article would have benefited from being more explicit about this.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods were adequately described. It would have helped me to have a better understanding of the structure of the different information products that were being read, and the differences between them. For example did all the products have numbers as data in them? What proportion of them had evidence that was ambiguous? Was there a grading as to the difficulty in interpreting the information? How were these products chosen?

Although I accept that the analysis was discussed by all the authors, I would feel more confident of the coding if a few test transcripts were double coded at the beginning.

I wanted more information about ‘supplementary elements’ that were excluded in analysis because of ‘high variability’ – was that high variability in content or quality?

Some more information about how the focus groups were conducted, and how people were supported to contribute to the discussion would have strengthened the article.

3. Are the data sound?

Very little raw data is presented – with quotes from participants in a table in an annexe, to illustrate the various reactions identified. I have no reason to think that they are not sound. All the quotes have a number identification which shows that they were taken from a variety of participants.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

I thought that quotes should have been used to illustrate the points made in the text. For example on page 13 there was a discussion about the reaction patterns ‘activation’ and ‘doubt’ where a complex interaction between these terms was described. It would have helped me to understand the points more if quotes were used and I would be able to see for myself whether the reactions of the participants did in fact match the explanation given.

There was no information given about how the data was stored.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

No the data do not address the first sentence from the ‘conclusions’: ‘this study on the assessment of health information from the users’ perspective reveals the different expectations and desires that readers bring to the text.’ The data were used to define a spectrum of reactions and did not explore expectations or desires – as one would assume that these ideas would have been explored before they were given the texts to read. This was not done.
I think without a clearer picture of what the information products actually were, it is difficult to see how this article would contribute to a clearer presentation of scientific research. The audience for these products remains unclear also.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes, they did discuss their sample and that they are not representative. However, I think that if they had thought about the audience and recruited to some identified characteristics – such as the ‘expert patient’, carer, healthy person, etc – they might have got a better picture of expectations and the different reactions – what kind of information is important to whom?

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes, this was fine.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
I don’t think it reveals anything about expectations, as suggested in the abstract and I don’t agree with the claim that the study can be used to as a starting point for reflection on editing EBHI, as all it seems to be saying is that people have a range of reactions to the material.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
The standard of English is high.

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

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

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