Reviewer's report

Title: Peer support for stroke survivors: A formative evaluation

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Reviewer: REG MORRIS

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Review of: 'Peer support for stroke survivors: A formative evaluation'
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Research article

REVIEWER'S REPORT

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes, the research objectives were clearly articulated

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Yes, the methods were appropriate. They were generally well described, although some aspects require clarification.

3. Are the data sound?
   The data appear to be sound and were analysed using a standardised transparent process. There was some attention to inter-rate agreement (PI & RA).

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

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   Largely this is the case. In certain passages the draft should make it clear that the results are based upon participants’ perceptions, and not objective measures.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   This aspect did receive attention.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   There are appropriate references to relevant previous studies.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   The title is informative. The Abstract is generally appropriate, but there is some repletion and it should be re-organised.
9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes, the writing is clear. I have a few comments about structure, overly detailed information and repetition.

- Discretionary Revisions
1. Sentence 3 of Background. Find a better word to replace ‘integrate’.

- Minor Essential Revisions
1. Abstract: The “Background” section is too detailed. It should identify the aim and overarching objective. This section could be improved. The sentence starting “We carried out…” repeats material in the “Methods”, as do the detailed research questions. Suggest the detail is in “Method” section only. In the “Results” section change the third sentence to indicate that it was perceptions of increase social connections, personal growth, etc. I am not convinced about the robustness of the costing model (see below). Statements about cost should probably be more tentative.
2. References 9-11 refer to locality web-sources that may not be maintained. I am not convinced of the value of references to perishable, ephemeral sources. Try to find published sources if possible or delete.
3. Paras 5 and 6 of the Background. It is not necessary to discuss the location of the studies or the organisations. This is not done for the other cited studies. The key information is whether they were in hospital or community and this is made clear.
4. Section "e" of the "Results" should be headed "perceptions of resources and processes...". The current heading leads readers to expect and account of actual resources used, but this is only the case with "costs" which should be in a separate section (if included at all). The second para contained some fairly unsurprising and self-evident material (communication, collaboration) that could perhaps be omitted. The telephone follow-up calls do not require a separate subheading.
5. At the end of the Discussion, explain why individual peer support programmes are not as susceptible to disruption due to logistic issues as group approaches.

- Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Much of the material under ‘Programme Description’ which is currently in the Background section really belongs in the Method section. The first para is probably not necessary to aid readers’ understanding of the study. The sentence about “goals” belongs in the background section.
2. The programme description should include more information. Including: how many stroke survivors entered the programme; what was the duration of the visits; were all follow-up calls completed, if not, how many; how was the care partner involved, if at all. Details of numbers entering the programme should not be left until the "costs" section in the "results"
3. Since care partners were included in the study sample (6 in the first interview and 8 in the second), information about them should be recorded in Table 1. If this information is not available it is impossible to situate this component of the sample and their data should be removed and the study should focus on the data of the 16 survivors.

4. The "Results" section was logically organised and the findings were supported with relevant quotations. But perhaps the section could be condensed to save 10-15%.

5. The section on "costs" within the "Results" is poor. There is no proper rationale or explanation of how these data were collected, what precise elements are included, or how the estimates were arrived at. This should have been addressed in greater depth in the "Method" section. Until this aspect is properly enumerated the costs appear to rely on guesswork and are potentially misleading and should be omitted. It is laudable that the authors considered costs, but it is only worthwhile if this consideration is thoroughly and competently executed and reported.

6. In the first sentence of the Discussion section the reference should be to "..perceived benefits.."

7. The Discussion section could be better organised and makes scant reference to previous studies and does not situate the findings well within the context of the existing literature. There are several findings that need context: challenges for supporters; types and causes of potential harm to participants; process that facilitate effective peer support.

8. Collect all suggestions for service improvement within the Discussion into one section.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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