Reviewer's report

Title: The emotional base of self-care in chronic illness: A qualitative study of the role of health professional support in the self-management of type 2 diabetes.

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Reviewer: Martha M Funnell

Reviewer's report:

This well-written article describes the findings of focus groups conducted among 3 populations to assess the role of health professionals in providing social support for patients with diabetes. The finding of greatest interest was the disparity in responses between the different ethnic groups studied.

Essential revision:

I did not find the background balanced or compelling. The literature referenced seemed weak (one paper is actually about lay-lead groups) and did not support the need to address the issues defined. There are however, stronger studies that do support the importance of these issues with patients. For example, the move away from didactic educational programs into more patient-centered, empowerment-based models (Norris et al) and the resulting benefits of these types of programs and the DAWN study describing the importance of these issues in self-management. The studies cited are not only weak, but also do not make a compelling case for the need to determine appropriate strategies for health professionals to use when working with patients, regardless of the venue. I also did not understand why lay-lead programs were included in the background in two places, given this study was undertaken to determine the health professional's role in social support.

Because conducting valid focus groups requires a specific set of skills, please describe who conducted the groups, information about their backgrounds and steps that were taken to ensure honest communication. Since this is the primary "intervention" it needs to be addressed to understand the validity of the findings.

Discretionary revisions:

A small point, but the term ‘allied health professional’ is offensive to nurses and dietitians in some countries. It would make more sense to say who they are.

Of greater concern is the lack of generalizability of these results. It might be helpful to describe how the results will be (or could be) used in the development of interventions.

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 do not have any competing interests