Reviewer's report

Title: Uncovering emotion work in clinical trials: a qualitative study of the experiences and views of staff involved in a type 1 diabetes trial

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Reviewer: Mary Dixon-Woods

Reviewer's report:

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

The authors argue that qualitative research is important alongside clinical trials. While I don't disagree with this, I would suggest that it should not be the opening gambit for the paper. It is important that the paper focuses in on the substantive research question rather than making a claim for the value of a particular research methodology.

The question of staff experiences of trial "work" is an important one but as currently described in the paper refers more to a general field of study rather than a well-formulated research question with defined terms. The authors need to clarify the question they wish to address more precisely. For instance, there may be many different roles for staff on a trial - from those involved in recruitment to those involved in design and those involved in delivery of interventions. Their experiences are likely to be heterogeneous, and it is also likely that, say, the experience of the Chief Investigator may be very different from that of a research nurse. The authors should acknowledge this more clearly in their introduction, by way of more explicitly defining the specific research question.

The Introductory section would also be clearer with a more detailed discussion of the concept of emotional work/emotional labour and its potential value in exploring issues of trial work. At present most of this material is currently found in the Discussion.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The sub-heading of the Methods section seems to have been mis labelled. Most of the Methods are in a section labelled "Results". This section is reasonably clearly report but would benefit from a couple of introductory sentences to explain the study design.

The authors say that they analysed the data thematically, but they do not provide any reference for the method used. This is an important weakness as it is not clear whether the analysis was informed by any prior framework (as is often a feature of framework analysis) or whether the categories of analysis were grounded solely in the data themselves (as in some variants of grounded theory).
The authors should give a reference for the concept of theoretical saturation, which they draw on without using the term explicitly.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

The findings section would be clearer with a paragraph at the beginning to orientate the reader to the main categories of findings.

This section is actually rather hard to follow without in-depth knowledge of the trial itself. The authors need to avoid assuming any prior knowledge on the part of the reader.

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

I am not sure about data deposition but reporting seems to be fine. I think they could explain a little more clearly that the research question in some senses appears to have been conceived post-hoc, after the data were collected.

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

The Discussion and conclusions are fine, and actually this section is perhaps the best part of the paper. It's a little long and the authors might consider shortening a bit, and perhaps putting a summary their recommendations into a box so that the implications of the study are clear. They should also acknowledge more clearly the need to evaluate their recommendations, not just to work out whether they are effective but also to assess the costs involved.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Yes.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

It's a bit clunky, with some very long and not always terribly grammatical sentences, but it is acceptable.

Please make your report as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

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

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
Once you have done this, there are also some questions for you to answer, including one that asks your advice on publication.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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