Reviewer's report

Title: Feedback reporting of survey data to healthcare aides

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Reviewer: Bryan Burford

Reviewer's report:

The paper is well written and addresses an important area of knowledge transfer, in the cost-effective sharing of research results with participant groups who are often excluded from such activity. However I think the paper could benefit from a greater development of its core message, which I take to be as a guide to one approach to disseminating research findings. I have made suggestions that I feel would be necessary to optimise its accessibility and usefulness to its readership. I think the paper seems slightly long, and would benefit from some précis throughout, and attention to repetition of points.

The first of the major compulsory revisions I have highlighted relates specifically to the detail given of the poster in the method, but also reflects on the paper as a whole. I think its value is not clear on the surface because that key information is not provided.

The others, relating to the focus groups, initially seemed to fall in the discretionary category, but the more I think about it the more problematic this aspect of the method seems. It seems, as written, to be a mismatch between intent and data, which comes across as a serious flaw. That does not mean I see the solution as a complex one though - it may be dealt with by a simple rewrite, or even deletion of that section.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Method:

Page 8, overall. Given the object of study, I think an illustration of the format of the poster, either an example or at least a schematic, would be very useful in conveying the key point of the paper, as I read it, which is the simplicity and accessibility of the means by which the feedback is conveyed. It may also make this section easier to précis, as the method section particularly seems very long. In the results you talk about the appropriate amount of text, but we don’t have the information on how much text was included. I think the key point of the paper is /how/ this information was conveyed, and without this information the paper undersells its potential value and is hard to evaluate fully.

Page 8, para 2: I have some concerns about the focus groups, which became apparent in the results, but I think could be addressed here (although also in the limitations). The rationale for running focus groups with the RAs is not clear,
particularly as their responses relate to the HCAs views, so the data is second hand. I'll return to this below. ‘Content analysis’ also covers a multitude, and a little more detail on how it was approached would be useful.

Results:

Pages 12-14: As alluded to above, I had a bit of a problem with the role of the focus group data, perhaps because the rationale wasn’t given in the method. I can see how their views are important as they are the agents by which the reports are disseminated, but as presented it makes them seem like proxy-participants restating the views of the HCAs at one remove, and as such made me more sceptical about the validity of the data, and asking the question ‘Why not get this direct from the HCAs?’ Reframing this section so it is about the RAs’ views of the dissemination/transfer process would make it more valuable. As it is, I don’t feel it adds much, and the quotes add length to the paper without really providing additional insight.

Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract:

Page 2, para 1, final sentence: This sentence is not clear, and I would suggest restructuring to be clearer about what the feedback is, and what form the feedback report takes; e.g.: ‘The purpose of the study was to evaluate HCAs’ perceptions of a one-page poster designed to feed back aggregated data from the TREC survey they had recently completed’. The italics in the current version are also superfluous, and slightly confusing.

Page 2, para 3, sentence 1: The use of ‘completed’ with reference to an interview, albeit structured, seems wrong, and I would suggest changing to ‘responded to’.

Background:

Page 5, para 2, first sentence: as in the abstract, the italics are superfluous and distracting.

Page 5, para 2: I originally wondered what the difference between ‘understandability’ and ‘usability’ was, because my understanding of the word ‘usability’ relates to accessibility and ease of use. However on looking at the appendix I realised that you are using it to mean ‘likelihood of being put to use’ – more similar to usefulness in fact, although I can just about see the distinction you’re making. I would strongly recommend reconsidering your terminology, as I think the sense intended by ‘usability’ would not be that inferred by many readers. You may also wish to make the distinction between your ‘usability’ and understandability more explicit.

Method:

Page 8, para 2: Could you clarify whether there was any sampling frame used in
recruiting the HCA participants? The figure of 10-20 per site seems rather arbitrary as presented (particularly for the larger sites – what is the distribution of numbers of HCA staff across the 7 participant organisations, and the 36 in total?). I don’t think there’s a problem with a convenience sample, or these numbers, but a bit more information to contextualise the study would be useful.

Results:

Page 11, para 2: I had a problem with the clarity of this paragraph, and would suggest rewriting it. I’m assuming you dichotomised the question about the amount of text into satisfied/dissatisfied in order to run a chi-square, but this isn’t made explicit. The sentence ‘Fewer people…(approximately 50%)’ seems counterintuitive, and while I can what is being said, I think rewording and/or adding a table with the full crosstab would make the point clearer.

Discussion:

Page 15, para 1: ‘disinterest’ should be ‘lack of interest’!

Discretionary Revisions

Background:

Page 4, para 1, final sentence: this sentence led me to expect examples from the Kelly et al paper.

Page 5, para 1, first sentence: I think ‘feedback program’ set my expectations for something more complex than the study is actually about. I would suggest that ‘feedback intervention’ or ‘means of delivering feedback’ would be more descriptive and explicit about what is going to be looked at.

Method:

Page 7: first para (cont from p6), last sentence: following ‘we found it difficult to achieve …reading level of 8’ – some elaboration of why it was difficult, and what sort of information exceeded the desired level, would be very useful.

Page 8, para 3: there’s a repetition of ‘convenient’ which suggests the paragraph could be condensed. In the final sentence (on p9) I think the word ‘survey’ could be replaced with ‘interview’ for clarity.

Results:

Page 11, para 3: Is there a reason why such a low proportion of HCAs attended an information session? Do you have data to allow comparison of the interview responses of those who attended a session and those who didn’t?

Discussion:

Pages 15-16: I think these pages could be simplified, as there is some redundancy in the sense of the first two paras on p15 and they could be integrated. I think the section is structured around two points: 1) the
consequences of the feedback for practice (which is basically contained in the first part of the para crossing pp15-16), and 2) the consequences of the feedback for future research (para 2 on p15). I think the first point is the most important, so should come first. I think you usefully raise a risk of unintended consequences of feedback, and confounding of future research, but this could be articulated a bit more – how exactly it may it effect future response rates (p15, para 2), what benefits might it have, and implicitly should all research in these circumstances be seen as de facto action research which will directly change practice? There are some quite big questions arising, which you could have space to get into with a bit of condensing of the current material.

The latter part of the para bridging pp15-16, which talks about the choice of items to report on the poster, seems a different point to the question of transfer, and one worth elaborating. A bit more discussion here on how and why the variables were selected for inclusion would be useful as a guide to others.

Page 16, para 2. This paragraph doesn’t seem to add much, and I think the point could be incorporated with a reworked paragraph on the consequences for future research.

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.