Reviewer's report

Title: Development of an online information and support resource for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis patients considering surgery: perspectives of health care providers

Version: 2 Date: 31 May 2010

Reviewer: Joseph O'Brien

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Comment 1:
If the goal of this paper is strictly to build a website for the patients having surgery at the authors’ Institution then I congratulate them and have no further comment on this paper. On the other hand, there is no mention within the paper of any intent to password protect or restrict access in any way. As such, it would appear that the goal extends beyond their Institution and will be viewed by patients worldwide as generally happens with today’s internet.
In such case, there appears to be other limitations of this paper and statements that do not live up to the evidence and rigorous standards of trustworthiness applied towards the focus groups. For example, in the background section the authors state, “Unfortunately, most current online resources emulate the deficiencies of current clinical practice by providing incomplete and inconsistent information and minimal or no venue for social support.” The authors cite a paper by Kortum P, Edwards C, Richards-Kortum R in 2008 in support of this statement which is a general paper about the topic of vaccines, and not specifically referring to online resources addressing the topic of surgery for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis.

Response: Thank you for your feedback. This reference has been removed from our paper (see page 4). We have added a paragraph describing a review of traditional nonweb-based and web-based resources patient information and support literature in scoliosis conducted by our research team prior to undertaking the needs assessment (please see page 4).

Comment 2:
The authors make no mention of existing online scoliosis resources, nor take any measures to ascertain whether or not the focus groups’ needs would be met by such resources. A simple google search results in millions of references, including several that are well known reputable information sources, such as the Scoliosis Research Society, the American Academy of Orthopedics, the NIH, Spine Universe etc. Furthermore, there are several other sites such as iscoliosis and spinekids that are geared specifically for teens and also include the social networking venues the authors refer to. Building another website may help communicate what the authors institution thinks is appropriate as expressed by one of their focus group members, but on the other hand, it is yet another website for a patient to go to which displays potentially contradictory information and more frustration in knowing what to expect or do. The paper would be more meaningful if the existing resources were addressed with appropriate analysis to evidence why spending money and time on another new website resource is warranted.

Response: Thank you for your feedback. As indicated above, and described in the manuscript on page 4, we have previously reviewed tradition and web-based resources.

Thank you for addressing the issues cited in my first review. I appreciate the further explanation of a” review of traditional nonweb-based) and web-based resources patient information and support literature in scoliosis conducted by our research team prior to undertaking the needs assessment” and the subsequent “competitive analysis” used as the basis of your judgments regarding existing scoliosis websites. I did not see any references you cited that provide further explanation of this important work you undertook. Due to the fact that your entire focus group series is based upon these two items I believe more detailed description of your scoliosis specific DISCERN and Competitive Analysis methodology along with the outcome data to evidence the results of these two processes are warranted.

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'