Author's response to reviews

Title: Even the best laid plans: a qualitative study of the experience of transitioning to wheelchair use among older adults and their care providers

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Author's response to reviews:

Reviewer 1

1. Title and Abstract: The abstract summarizes the study well and clearly conveys the fact that MWC users and their carers were studied. Perhaps the title should reflect that carer’s experiences were also studied. Perhaps the title could read something like “Navigating uncharted territory: a qualitative study of carers and older adults’ experiences in transitioning to wheelchair use.”

In line with the suggestion of the reviewer, we have modified the title to “Navigating uncharted territory: a qualitative study of the experience of transitioning to wheelchair use among older adults and their care providers”.

2. Methods - Participants - MWC Users (1st paragraph): The authors describe the characteristics of the MWC users. More details might be useful to assist the reader in understanding of the people in the study. This information could possibly be added to the table and gathered by asking each person to estimate where needed (so long as it did not compromise the anonymity of the people studied). For example: how long does each person spend in the chair per day; how far does each person travel in their wheelchair in a day or week; is the wheelchair used mostly indoors or outdoors?

As suggested, we have added some additional descriptive content regarding the participants and their level of wheelchair activity in this section (lines 186-190).

3. Results - The Wheelchair User Experience ‘Theme 1: On My Own’ (1st paragraph and subsequent paragraphs). The authors describe the responses of participants in general terms such as ‘most participants’ or ‘a few shared similar experiences’. It would be useful to know how many or what percentage of participants made these comments e.g. does ‘most’ mean more than (say) six or seven or more than that? Is ‘a few’ two or three participants or less?

This section has been modified to more explicitly identify the number of participants (lines 205-207).
4. Discussion - paragraph 8: The authors identify that the number of carers studied is limited and that participants were a composite of people undergoing transition to MWC use and those experiencing the transition of aging as a MWC user. There are potentially other sub-groupings of people whose reports and experiences might have had some things in common. For example, Table 1 shows that there were three (3) subjects from the Vancouver site, who had formal skills training in MWC use, were of (broadly) similar ‘middle age’ (69, 61 and 55 years of age) and had a substantial number of years of experience in MWC use i.e. 50, 39 and 11 years respectively. Given the things this sub-set of people had in common were their responses to questions and comments also similar and could they be grouped or themed in any way? If their responses or comments were dissimilar or could not be grouped or themed was there a reason for this? The reviewer appreciates that the limited number of participants restricts any deep analysis of the parameters raised but a brief discussion or mention would help the reader gain a better understanding of the situations/environments in which study participants functioned and therefore the context of their responses.

The reviewer raises an interesting point. The three gentlemen identified did share a commonality of having been at the same rehabilitation facility (which provides wheelchair skills training) albeit in different decades. Consequently, they did convene on the topic of their own training experience – this has now been highlighted in the Results section (theme 1) as suggested (lines 231-233). However, beyond this point there were no particular unifying themes among this subset of participants; rather, there was substantial consensus (as well as some discourse) among participants independent of age, length of wheelchair use and transition age. We suspect that this speaks to commonalities in the experience of older adults adopting wheelchair mobility, as well as the limited capacity to explicate sub-themes with this number of participants as the reviewer notes.

Reviewer 2

1. The way manuscript written it seems the study is focusing on older adults who recently transitioned to using wheelchair, which in fact not the case. The wheelchair users part of this study are considered as experienced users. Thus the authors should try to reword sentences in the manuscript to make this point clear that, the study is about exploring experiences for wheelchair users when they transition to wheelchair use.

   We reviewed the wheelchair user content and made a number of modifications to ensure clarity that the participants were retrospectively reflecting on the transition to wheelchair use; several of these changes involved framing content in the past tense.

2. It would be helpful for readers to have a table summarizing all the themes and sub-themes that emerged out of the focus group.
We have created Figure 1 (inserted at line 204 for convenience), which provides the overarching themes and subthemes for the two groups.

3. From the manuscript it looks like this study was conducted to provide in depth understanding for designing a larger study for wheelchair users related to wheelchair skills training. However, this point is not coming across in the conclusion section of the manuscript, neither reflected well in the discussion section. The authors should add such description in both discussion and conclusion section.

The reviewer’s suggestion of linking to the training program, which was an impetus for the study, is a good one. We have made several intentional additions in the discussion section (lines 439-441; 454-455; 508-512) to connect the study findings and elements integrated into the training program. In addition, we have tied the importance of training and some core components of our training program into the Conclusion (lines 543+).


The content related to ethical approval has been moved to the end of the first paragraph in the methods section (lines 122-125), as requested.

5. Discussion: As mentioned in the overall comments section, there needs a better connection between the overarching objective of this study to information provided in the discussion/conclusion section. In the current format, description related to need of wheelchair training program, and how this study can guide development of such program is limited.

See comments from item 3 above.