Reviewer's report

Title: Even the best laid plans: a qualitative study of older adults' experience transitioning to wheelchair use

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Reviewer: Ross Black

Reviewer's report:

The authors address an important question in the uptake of manual wheelchair use by examining the process and impact of adjusting to wheelchair use for both older adult users and their care providers. The work uses qualitative research methods because, as they rightly claim, the experience of transitioning to wheelchair use is a relatively unexplored phenomenon and difficult to ascertain through quantitative means. A novel feature of the article is the analysis of comments by both users and carers. Of particular note are the comments of carers in facilitating and maintaining the wheelchair user in a number of environments. The research question is well defined.

Exploration of the question using participatory action design is a particularly appropriate method as it is an iterative approach designed to examine the invisible aspects of human activity. The components of manual wheelchair use are largely invisible until teased out by the research method described. The methods are well described.

All comments are discretionary revisions only:

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.”

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:
   i) how long does each person spend in the chair per day?
   ii) how far does each person travel in their wheelchair in a day or week?
   iii) is the wheelchair used mostly indoors or outdoors?

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?

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.

**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.