Reviewer's report

Title: Macro and meso level influences on long term condition self-management: stakeholder accounts of commonalities and differences across six European countries

Version: 5 Date: 17 April 2015

Reviewer: Patrick Harris

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions to address the following:

I feel, like Prof Rutten, that the authors need to be much clearer about core concepts. However I think the problem lies in a mis-understanding of the difference between structure and agency and the institutional dimensions to this. The authors reference Greenhalgh now, but Greenhalgh’s work stems from a very nuanced position about structure and agency and methods to elicit this in research. This paper clearly does not come from a similar position of conceptual depth, and therefore clarity suffers. The clearest example of this is conflating individual action (the purpose of the paper!) at a meso level, rather than a micro one. This is a major flaw which requires addressing in the background and analysis for the paper to be accepted. Overall the inductive nature of the analysis could be strengthened by bringing in some political science theories and understanding of stratified levels within institutions.

Also the manuscript remains sloppily edited in places, and the language could be much clearer.

Some other detailed criticisms are:

The additional information provided about the SMS is under the ‘Key information interviews’ section when it should be in the introduction.

References 3 and 4 do not really seem to support the issues about macro vs meso (vs micro) issues.

The thematic analysis seems okay but did the authors make up their approach or was this rooted in some of the qualitative methods literature (Silverman is a good introduction). There are too many papers being written now which appear to have some magic ability to do a thematic analysis, which is not useful and may actually miss off some core dimensions of what this approach is and how it can be achieved.

Relatedly I feel there are too many quotes and not enough analysis.

In table 2 why are there some themes which no country seems to have discussed. This suggests the themes were not inductively developed but were pre-conceived. Table 2 also needs to be more clearly aligned with the themes that appear in the data – for example the role of the media is not in table 2.

Overall the analysis suffers from not being sign-posted enough. Each finding and
core theme should be clearly articulated up front in each paragraph (or section), and a meaningful table or figure could be also produced to help the reader navigate the issues.

The discussion is depressingly short given the implications of the research. This is limited by the authors lack of knowledge of the broader empirical and theoretical literature.

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None