Reviewer’s report

Title: A Qualitative Process Evaluation of a Diabetes Navigation Program Embedded in an Endocrine Specialty Center in Rural Appalachian Ohio

Version: 0 Date: 12 Feb 2018

Reviewer: Nancy Schoenberg

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript explores perspectives of a patient navigation program for diabetes as assessed by the navigators themselves, health care administrators, and office staff. The project took place in Appalachian Ohio, where residents experience high burdens of diabetes. The manuscript is very clearly written, the research methods well described, and the findings reasonable and enlightening. There are several recommendations, as follows:

1. "Social determinants of health" (p. 1 line 51) (SDH) should be defined. Some readers may lack familiarity with the term.

2. Also, the way that this term is used on page 4 (line 19) is a bit challenging—"one or more social determinants of health" seems to connote that SDH are negative when, in fact, they are like any other determinant of health—neutral. I believe a more precise term might be "risk factor". For example, low SES is not a social determinant of health; SES is the SDH and having low SES is a risk factor for poor health outcomes.

3. It is unclear what the statement on page 4, line 48 means: "to address the complexities of diabetes and its management in the context of Appalachian culture." I did not see any cultural tailoring or culturally specific programming described, so some clarification of how the contextual background was addressed would be helpful.

4. Please describe what the nurse navigators actually do, particularly in addressing social components of health care. Do they actually arrange to "fill the holes" (p. 8), addressing housing issues, food insecurity, etc.? How? Do they arrange for a refrigerator (p. 9)? Is this more a referral to another agency or direct service? How does this intersect with the standard diabetes care?

5. I'd suggest staying away from "outcomes" data like that presented on page 11, line 29—where participants indicated improvements in self-care and glycemia. This discussion goes beyond the data and is not verifiable.

6. Similarly, in the discussion, there are a lot of positive assessments provided, which is understandable because the navigators have done a great deal of work and their clients likely are very pleased by their help. But it is important to refrain from comments like that on page 17 referenced early successes, improvements in glycemia, and even navigators providing a consistent point of connection until the evaluation data come in.
7. Please share with readers the limitation of involving a nurse as a navigator may be for the population targeted. Specifically, in a low resource environment, why is reliance on health care professionals a potential limitation?

8. Some of the material in the beginning of the discussion seems like it belongs in the introduction. It either is somewhat repetitive of the introduction (like prevalence rates) so does not need to be repeated in the manuscript or is more akin to a literature review so does not need to be in this section.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?
3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal