Reviewer’s report

Title: “I was able to eat what I am supposed to eat”– Patient reflections on a medically-tailored meal intervention: A qualitative analysis

Version: 0 Date: 14 Jun 2019

Reviewer: John Steiner

Reviewer's report:

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study among individuals with diabetes and food insecurity who received medically-tailored, home-delivered meals. Strengths of the paper include its focus on an area of great research interest that is a priority for the American Diabetes Association and others; its sound qualitative methods; its rich compilation of narratives, presented in Table 2; and its finding that providing these meals is itself an element of diabetes education that might be linked with other educational interventions.

Concerns about the paper include:

1. The conclusion of the abstract is very general. Mentioning some of the actionable findings would be helpful to readers who may not read the body of the paper.

2. In the introduction, the authors state that food insecurity "predisposes" to CVD or CKD. This statement implies causation, but the cited analyses of NHANES data were cross-sectional. This statement should be qualified.

3. Paragraph 3 of the discussion states that the "study highlights financial barriers." This theme is not emphasized in the results section, although there are many illustrative quotes in Table 2. An additional sentence or two and a quotation in the results section would bolster that statement.

4. Although the large number of quotes in Table 2 provides helpful context, the list could be pruned to focus more on the intervention specifically. For example, the first comment on interactions with staff address staff at the clinic, not the medically tailored meals program. There are also several comments about the food itself - too much rice or too little - which seem like the kind of complaints that people would have about any food they didn't prepare, and may not be of general interest to readers. I do acknowledge that these quotes do make it easier to envision the actual conversations!

5. Overall, the results are unsurprising, since it is hard to imagine how individuals with food insecurity would not be enthusiastic about a food program tailored to their medical needs. Reading qualitative studies, I often wonder if there were any "minority reports" from participants who felt globally negatively about the program? Much as a quantitative study
reports side effects or unanticipated consequences, the paper might benefit from providing negative comments, even if rare. If none were found, this could be stated.

6. Several issues of interest were not addressed, although it's not clear whether these issues were raised in the interviews.

   a. Reductions in social isolation are commonly cited as a benefit of any home-delivered meals program. Since social isolation is itself associated with poor health, any comments about that issue would provide additional insight.

   b. The extensive quotes about finances are very useful. Were there comments about how reductions in the participants' financial burden from these meals might help them address other basic resource needs such as housing costs or utilities?

   c. Did the authors inquire about the preferred duration of medically-tailored meals? Do they need to be provided indefinitely, or does a short period of service provide enough education and modeling that participants could continue on their own? This would be a major concern for health system leaders who are (perhaps inordinately) concerned about the up-front costs of the service rather than on its longer term but less tangible benefits, particularly when the potential pool of beneficiaries is very large.

   d. If these issues were not addressed in the interviews, the authors could point out as a limitation that there is a set of other concerns about these programs that requires further research.

**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

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