Reviewer’s report

Title: The role of emotion in clinical decision making: an integrative literature review

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Reviewer: Meghan McConnell

Reviewer’s report:

Abstract/Title

See my comments in the "Background" section re: my confusion with the emotion/EI distinction.

Results should highlight the themes found.

Background

The topics of the present paper - namely clinical decision making (CDM)/clinical reasoning, emotional intelligence (EI), and emotions - are very complex and are associated with a lot of research and literature. While I think such a review is certainly important, the authors need to make sure they explicitly operationalize these terms for the reader. For example:

1) CDM has been studying for many years, albeit without much emphasis on emotions. Given that different readers will bring with them different definitions of CDM, the authors need to be explicit in what they define as CDM. The closest to a definition we get is the first sentence - "hypothetic-deductive process of determining patients' problem", but this definition if phrased in a historical context. By the end of the first paragraph, I am still not entirely sure what the authors mean by "CDM"

2) Emotional Intelligence and Emotions. As with CDM, these terms are associated with a comprehensive literature. I'm admittedly more familiar with "emotions" than I am with EI, but there are literally books written defining emotions (and comparing them with other affective constructs, such as moods, feelings, etc). I'm not sure the authors ever define with EI or emotions - even in the "EI" setting of the introduction, the first sentence is describing the favourable outcomes associated with EI before EI is formally defined (although the authors made reference to different domains of EI in the intro paragraph - e.g., 'social awareness'). Given that the constructs of EI, emotions, and CDM are at the core of this review, it is really important that the authors explicitly define these constructs for the reader.

I'm also a little confused by the emotion/EI distinction. At times, the authors seem to use these terms interchangeably. In the second paragraph of the "EI" section (lines 5-24, p. 5), the authors try to differentiate the terms by stating that EI is linked to 'peoples knowledge about emotions
and dealing with emotions….people's ability to apply such knowledge when one is in an emotional situation…. and people's propensity to act in these ways. My take on this section is that the authors are conceptualizing EI as an ability to deal with emotions. So I feel as though they are looking more at how EI influences CDM, not emotions. Everyone has emotions, but not everyone has EI. This may be more clear if the authors had defined by what they mean by "emotions" (e.g., not looking at how emotions influence CDM, but rather how clinicians' EI influence how they deal with emotions?). Their aim is to 'identify empirical evidence for the role of emotions and/or EI', and I admittedly see these as separate (albeit overlapping) constructs….

In terms of literature relating emotions and CDM, Estrada and colleagues did some work on positive emotions and CDM (in the 90s). Vicki LeBlanc has also done some work on how stress and anxiety influences clinical performance in paramedics. The authors may have reasons to have not included these articles, but they may be relevant.

Methods

Given that "emotions" was a search term, what about related constructs such as "moods", "feelings", "affect"

I would have liked a bit more information on "integrative literature reviews". What does this review method entail - e.g., how were "emergent themes" identified?

Results

The authors identify 3 subthemes. When discussing the subthemes, it would be helpful for the introductory sentence describe the theme (like done with subtheme 2), then describe the studies in the context of this theme (instead of starting the subtheme sections off with description of study)

I initially thought the section "The application of emotion and cognition in CDM" was the start of the discussion, but it actually starts describing additional themes. How do these themes related to the ones described above (e.g., emotional response to contextual pressures, emotional responses to others, intentional exclusion of emotions from CDM)? I now realize that they are 2 themes - this should be clear right off the bat.
Discussion

The authors state, "Uncertainty is a key feature in the emotional context of CDM" Uncertainty has been discussed in the literature - is there any previous studies that are applicable to the findings of the present study?

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

No

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

Yes

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?
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