Reviewer’s report

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

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Reviewer: Rebecca Ferrer

Reviewer's report:

This is a potentially very important paper examining how emotion may influence clinical decision making, and what is known across the extant literature. Given that clinical decision making is often examined from a more deliberative or "rational" perspective, this could make a very large contribution to the literature by helping to facilitate a shift in how we think about clinical decision making. Importantly, this shift would be in line with what is known from decades of research on decision making in other domains, research that has even made its way into other disciplines that treat decision making as a more deliberative endeavor (like economics and policy). There is a tremendous need to translate affective and decision science to clinical decision making to improve our understanding of how medical decisions are made. As such, if the paper can be (greatly) strengthened, it would be impactful.

That said, my enthusiasm for the paper is dampened by several important concerns, including the somewhat limited affective science theoretical perspectives and concepts that are integrated into the paper and the search; the search terms and strategy themselves; and an inattention to unpublished literature. I detail each of these concerns below.

The authors seem to conflate emotion and emotional intelligence in the abstract. The role of emotion (i.e., specific and currently experienced affective states) in decision making is fairly well-established, as is the role of anticipated affect (i.e., cognitive representations of affective states, like believing one will feel regret in the future). Emotional intelligence is a more controversial (see Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008), and the influence on decision making may depend on how it is operationalized.

It is unclear to me why the authors focused on emotional intelligence to the exclusion of other less controversial affective science concepts/ individual differences. For example, there is a large literature on emotion and communication, and another on emotion regulation, and concepts from these literatures are surely relevant to clinical decision making (e.g., emotion expression; emotion suppression; cognitive reappraisal; social regulation of emotion; emotion co-regulation). Moreover, there is a literature on empathy and clinical decision making that seems relevant, particularly given that empathy has been considered to be related to or even subsumed under emotional intelligence.
It is also unclear to me why the authors focused so much on the somatic marker hypothesis, to the exclusion of other very relevant decision making models. For example, the appraisal tendency framework (Han et al., 2007) is quite relevant to clinical decision making, and has even been applied to medical/ health decision making (Ferrer et al., 2016).

Beyond concerns about the narrowness of concepts included (in the introduction and search terms), I also am somewhat concerned by other aspects of the search terms and the way that they are described. Given how broad these terms are, as described, it is nearly impossible that this search would have yielded only 479 articles. For example, some of the search terms are emotions and emotion*. These terms alone would have yielded over tens of thousands of articles in PsychInfo. The authors should more clearly describe the search - including whether quotation marks were used at all, whether terms were grouped together, and whether AND or OR were used between terms or sets of terms - as well as whether the search was limited to title/ abstract or searched the full article. Moreover, the term "clinical" seems somewhat limiting: there are papers that describe social or decision-making phenomena among physicians (or other specific types of medical care providers) that never use the term clinical, and it seems these could be excluded depending on the way that the search was structured.

Were unpublished studies included (e.g., dissertations)? Did the authors attempt to locate unpublished data from relevant listservs or authors known to do work in this area?

There are 15 quantitative articles - depending on whether the articles examine similar emotional influences on clinician decision making and report conceptually similar decision-making outcomes, this should be enough to synthesize quantitatively (i.e., in a meta-analysis). Have the authors considered this, or do the exact parameters of the literature not lend themselves well to this type of inquiry?


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.

Unable to assess

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

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