Reviewer's report

Title: Ethical challenges experienced by UK military medical personnel deployed to Sierra Leone (Operation GRITROCK) during the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak: a qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 05 Oct 2017

Reviewer: James Thomas

Reviewer's report:

The paper reports on a qualitative analysis of military personnel deployed to a medical unit in the midst of the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone. It provides a rare, systematic look at ethical perceptions in a highly charged environment. I have a few high-level comments and few particular ones.

At a high level: in some places, the authors note that report statements reflect the perceptions of the respondents. Elsewhere (e.g., line 102) the mention of ethical challenges gives the impression that they can be objectively viewed as ethical. The paper would be stronger if the authors would note throughout that these are "perceptions" of the respondents. For example in the sentence beginning on line 101, they might write "the key objectives for this qualitative study were to elicit and explore the challenges of working in the Ebola treatment unit that military personnel viewed as having an ethical element." We then explored how they respond...

What was the mission of the unit? And how did it determine who would be admitted? This needs to be stated early in the paper.

The discussion and conclusion were unsatisfying. I understand that this research was descriptive. But it also holds the potential to inform future similar deployments. Might there be recommendations for bringing greater ethical clarity to the military personnel for their next deployment? Might there be some ethical reasoning included in the "drills and skills"? Is there room for a process to sort through ethical challenges during the deployment?

Specific comments

Line 109. How many potential participants were there?

Line 151. What was the composition of the project advisory group?

Line 163. Line 162. How long were the interviews? This sentence is missing a period. Is it finished?
Line 384. Could you add a clause or sentence explaining what body mapping is?

Line 418. Remove d from adverse.

Line 439. Balance between risk to self and patient care is mentioned as the introduction to Table 2, then again in Table 2. This is a little confusing. Instead of saying this balance is "reflected in" the table, it might be less confusing to say it is "included in" the table.

Line 442. Table title should be for *perceived* ethical challenges.

Line 527. Capitalize Number and insert [Downing Street] in square parentheses.

**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

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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