Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Empowerment of patients in online discussions about medicine use

**Version:** 4  **Date:** 30 October 2014

**Reviewer:** Samantha A. Adams

**Reviewer’s report:**

I enjoyed reading this article on empowerment of patients in online discussions about medicine use, a topic of increasing importance. I do, however, have several concerns about the article in its current form.

**Major Compulsory revisions**

My primary concern is that the paper presents itself as a qualitative study, yet the data is under-analyzed from a qualitative perspective and largely presented in a quantitative style in the text (very summative), backed up with quantitative frequency tables. The discussion also begins with more quantitative terminology. However, there is no explanation in the methods of how the quantitative analysis was done and the authors seem not to understand how to move from the coding of qualitative data to a richer data analysis. Moreover, the link between the coding categories and empowerment is shaky at best. Most of these categories have been identified in online studies without the framework of empowerment. So how do we know that these are empowering processes? Are there, for example, verbal cues in the text? I understand the reliance on Uden-Kraan from a Dutch perspective, but the authors could also draw on similar, older studies from international literature that more clearly operationalize the link between these notions.

In their categories, the authors do not list other types of advice, such as (indirect) encouragement between patients to stop taking medications or to self-regulate the dosage. This point does return in the latter half of the results and the discussion, but without reflection on how this relates to the categories. The authors also fail to explain how the 'professional with a pharmaceutical background' evaluated quality. These deficiencies in the methodology need to be corrected in a subsequent draft.

The authors could give more information on the sites reviewed, including a short description of type of site (the current description is vague) whether or not groups were moderated/monitored (and if so, by whom?) and how the sites and groups were structured, as the structure of a site can also determine the nature of the information posted there. They should also reflect on the methodological choices made (search and selection strategies, paraphrasing rather than direct translation, etc) and how this might influence their results and/or conclusions.

Overall the analysis feels like a preliminary draft and I am not convinced that they can draw the conclusions currently drawn based on the methodology used and
results currently presented. The analysis therefore needs to be entirely reworked. Be sure to analyze quotes properly, not leaving them to speak for themselves and ensure that the analysis and quotes match.

Minor Essential Revisions

There are English grammar mistakes in the abstract and main text and typographical errors in the reference list. I therefore recommend having subsequent drafts checked by a native English speaker.

A few references that might help the authors are listed below. They relate to doing qualitative analysis, sharing experiences on the internet and sharing experiences with medications.


Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have collaborated in the past with one of the authors on a research proposal, but currently have no additional competing interests.