Reviewer’s report

Title: A Delphi Study and Ranking Exercise to Support Commissioning Services: Future Delivery of Thrombectomy Services in England

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Reviewer: Rosemary Lim

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Title: A Delphi Study and Ranking Exercise to Support Commissioning Services: Future Delivery of Thrombectomy Services in England

The paper reports results of a Delphi study aimed (although subject to clarification from the authors) to derive consensus on how thrombectomy services could be organised in the future in England.

The aim of the study could be made much clearer - was it to explore the usefulness of the Delphi technique in the said context (as suggested in the abstract) or was it to derive consensus on how thrombectomy services could be organised in the future in England or was it both? As such, it is difficult to ascertain whether the title fully reflects the contents of the paper.

Background:

The need to conduct this study was adequately explained. However, it is premature to conclude that "The methods presented are generalisable beyond LAOS" at the end of the Background section.

Methods:

It would be useful to include sections on

1. The design of the study e.g. what is the Delphi technique, what the classic Delphi survey involves, how the current study differs alongside reasons for the differences e.g. classic first round involved development of the items for use in the Delphi but the authors have chosen another method to derive the items which was, in my opinion, equally valid.

2. Sample size - how was this determined; as there is currently no agreement as to the number to include, how did the authors make a decision on this?

Was this an eDelphi or was the study conducted using paper questionnaires?
When was the study conducted ie timeframe?

A statement/explanation of how free text comments were analysed.

Ethical consideration:

"This activity is deemed as not requiring Research Ethics Committee Review in accordance with UK Health Departments' Governance Arrangements for Research Ethics Committees (GAfREC) September 2011 - specifically: REC review is not normally required for research involving NHS or social care staff recruited as research participants by virtue of their professional role."

Was this decision reached by the authors or an ethics committee/representative? There may not be the need to seek NHS ethics approval but there would usually be a need for some form of ethical considerations either at a university or school level approval.

Recruitment of panellists for the first two Delphi rounds were unclear. Were panellist nominated or was there a request for participation using BASP's email database?

Page 6, lines 8-9 "An email was sent to the chair of the British Association of Stroke Physicians (BASP) Clinical Standards Committee to disseminate a request for participation to members" vs Page 8, line 17 "Following the two-round Delphi exercise with nominated BASP members,"

- Perhaps what happened here in terms of recruitment was purposive sampling and possibly also snowball sampling?

The authors should make clear the differences between the 2 delphi rounds and the ranking exercise; is the ranking exercise part of another Delphi study as panellists were now a separate group of people, or is this still the same study? Perhaps the previous suggestion of including a section on 'design' may provide clarification.

Page 10 lines 16-17 "Summary statistics for rankings assigned to options by respondents from the wider BASP and BSNR were calculated" Can the authors provide more information on what 'summary statistics' referred to?

Tables 2 and 3: it would have been useful to present results as IQR as described in the methods ie page 8, lines 1-2 "panellists were informed of aggregate-level summary

2 statistics (mode, median and interquartile range) for the 12 options"

Can the authors explain decision to use $\geq 75\%$ of the panellists' ratings for consensus rather than IQR? It is not always very clear which option was chosen/used. This would be an important point to make because there is no agreement on the best method to determine consensus.
Table 3 - there are 4 options in responses from BSNR - can the authors explain options 2 and 3 in the table.

Declarations - typo.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

"This survey was completed voluntarily and anonymously by respondents from the British Association of Stroke Physicians (BASP) and the British Society of Neuroradiologists (BSNR) and did not include any sensitive topics" - voluntary participation is standard. Authors mentioned that participants were pseudo-anonymous - not clear what this meant and does not match with the statement presented.

"Informed consent was also not sought for the present study because the Delphi and ranking exercises were completely anonymous." - informed consent would usually be required for participation in this type of research 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.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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Not relevant to this manuscript

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