Reviewer’s report

Title: Using information and communication technologies to involve patients and the public in health education in rural and remote areas: a scoping review

Version: 1 Date: 30 Jan 2018

Reviewer: Maurice Mars

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this systematic scoping review on using information and communication technologies to involve patients and public in health education in rural and remote areas. The title on the cover page refers to a systematic scoping review and the title on the manuscript to a scoping review.

The abstract refers correctly to patient and public involvement (PPI) in health education programmes in rural and remote areas. But, based on the preceding sentence, the uninitiated reader could interpret PPI as providing educational material on health to people in rural areas, a lot of which is going on in many countries. For example there are many text message based health education services, some physician driven, others not, on maternal and child health, antenatal care benefits, sun screen use, skin self examination, wellness advice, fitness apps, and advice on specific conditions such as asthma, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, behaviour change etc. PPI needs to be explained in one sentence in the abstract to avoid confusion.

It is not usual to have citations in the abstract.

A literature review was undertaken and a comprehensive description of the search strategy is provided. Unfortunately the inclusion criteria are not stated other than, "Studies that explicitly mentioned all four search terms in the title and/or abstract were included in the first screening." Based on figure 1, this then reduced the number of papers to 28, only 5 of which met the eligibility criteria. What were these criteria? The four key areas may have been found in more papers if, using PubMed as an example, the search was not limited to title and abstract, but included other terms [ot] or text word [tw] search tags when Mesh headings were not available. The term health education was broadened to include continuing professional development, but this was not a search term.

The fact that only five papers were found is not unexpected as educational programmes are seldom developed in and for rural communities. An area of the literature that may not have been found in the searches is in the field of app development where users' needs may be gauged prior to, and during, the software design process. Such papers that are more often published in the engineering, computing and management literature.
The paper is written in an unusual style. The authors go to great length to describe the review process, including who did what, who then decided on the next step, who undertook that step, who checked the work etc.. Much of what is presented in the methods can be summarised in a paragraph or two.

The discussion begins by stating the two questions to be answered by the scoping review, the second of which is "How can ICT be effectively employed for PPI in health education in rural areas?" The question as stated in the introduction is a different, "How effective is the use of ICT for PPI in health education in rural areas." The review found no data on the efficacy of the use of ICT for PPI. Which question was to be answered?

The paper is of some interest but needs major style revision and correction.

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?  
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Yes

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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