Reviewer’s report

Title: Long-term corticosteroid use and dietary advice: A qualitative analysis of the difficulties encountered by patients

Version: 1 Date: 01 Apr 2018

Reviewer: Heidi Lempp

Reviewer's report:

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I looked forward to read the paper, as indeed I have never reviewed a paper with this content re steroid use and life style advise. There are a number of major changes necessary for the paper to be accepted for publication in my view.

1) I suggest to add dietary advice in the title, not only life style advice, as otherwise the title is misleading.

2) I do not understand why many of the authors do not have academic email addresses?

3) I do not understand why ethics approval was not required, interviewing patients on a very sensitive topic?

4) Major revision in the English language is necessary, as it has not always been easy to follow the content, as words have been used that are uncommon for qual studies, e.g. semi-directed interviews, usually referred to as semi-structured (p.5/line 7

Background:

1) it would have been useful to contextualize steroid use by listing a number of long-term conditions, apart from Rheumatoid Arthritis, specifically as patients were recruited from GPs, e.g. asthma, other musculo-skeletal inflammatory conditions

2) what is meant by medical structure, did you mean medical hierarchy, p.4/line 25/26
Method:

1) p4/line 54/55: 'there should be no'... why not state: /the exclusion criteria were (pl see my comments re English language)

2) can you pl explain why so few GPs 8/150 responded to your invitations, I suggest to add this in the Discussion section under limitations of the study.

3) p.5/line 8/9: 'his' agreement, you also had female participants, 'his' is inappropriate

6) unclear who transcribed the interviews, how long the interviews took on average, how the interview guide was developed, authors stated the questions asked but did not state why those questions were asked, did the questions came from the literature and /or experiential knowledge?

7) no pilot study was conducted, very important in qual studies, to assess, comprehension of questions, timing, relevance of questions, research burden.

Validation of data unclear, as mostly stats methods were used, but no other methods of validation commonly applied in qual studies were described, e.g. external qual researcher cross-referenced the emerging codes/themes; inclusion of deviant accounts, application of single counting, presenting initial findings to research team to assess plausibility of findings etc.

8) Was wondering whether the authors mostly carried out quant studies, and therefore did not adopt qual methods

Results:

1) I could not assess the additional accounts file, so I find it difficult to assess the quality and relevance of the data, the identifiers under each accounts.

2) the diagram with main themes and sub-themes has been helpful, but without the actual accounts my assessment of the findings is very limited. It is generally helpful to have the themes, sub-themes and accounts withing the text, so the reader gets an insight about the findings and its relevance.

Discussion:
P9/Line2: who is meant by 'we', stated 'we know'....
Unless more clarity and transparency for the data analysis and findings are presented by the authors, I am afraid I cannot recommend the publication at the moment. The topic itself is very important. Hope the authors understand my feedback as constructive.

**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.

No

**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?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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