Author’s response to reviews

Title: The footwear experiences of people with gout: a qualitative study

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Author’s response to reviews:

Professor Catherine Bowen & Keith Rome
Editor-in-Chief Journal of Foot and Ankle Research
Re: The footwear experiences of people with gout: a qualitative study (JFAR-D-19-00055)

Dear Professor Bowen,

Thank you for considering our manuscript “The footwear experiences of people with gout: a qualitative study” for publication in Journal of Foot and Ankle Research.

We would also like to thank the reviewers for their feedback and suggested revisions to the manuscript. Please find attached out point-by-point responses to the reviewer’s comments along with a revised manuscript with track changes highlighted in yellow.

Thank you again for your consideration of our work.

Sincerely,

Mike Frecklington (corresponding author)
Reviewer #1: Dear Mr Frecklington and Co-authors, Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper. It is pleasing to see this qualitative study exploring the experiences of people living with gout, obtaining and wearing footwear. It is a worthwhile study and I believe it is suitable for publication in JFAR. I do suggest several edits and minor revisions, and present my comments according to the manuscript subheadings.

Abstract
On page 2, line 29 please elaborate on the term "participation". Line 34, insert "the presence of" before "tophi" and elaborate on "compromise".

Response: to address these points, the abstract has been amended to read “Footwear comfort was of great importance and linked to characteristics of footwear, with uncomfortable footwear negatively influencing participation in daily activities” and “Footwear use was further limited by the presence of foot tophi and flares, resulting in compromise of footwear choice”.

Background
The paper is well-contextualised by previous literature, however a brief definition of the terms gout and tophi would be helpful, particularly for the non-podiatrist audience (e.g. footwear manufacturers, retailers and others providing foot health care providers).

Response: The following sentence has now been added to open the background section “Gout is a common form of inflammatory arthritis characterised by deposition of monosodium urate (MSU) crystals, which form in people with high serum urate levels (hyperuricaemia). Gout can present as intermittent episodes of acute arthritis (gout flares) and/or subcutaneous nodules of MSU crystals (tophi)”.
On page 3, the sentence on lines 30-34 is unclear, please revise.

Response: this sentence now reads “Further, in a previous mixed-methods study using an online survey with open-ended questions people with gout reported difficulty finding suitable shoes, revealed the impact of shoes on activity and identified what they preferred in relation to footwear features”.

On page 3, line 39, consider replacing "in this population" with "of people living with gout". I would also suggest rewording the aim to reflect the findings presented (you could simply exclude barriers and facilitators).

Response: The following statements have been added to the background to provide an overview of gout and tophi. Aim has been revised to exclude barriers and facilitators, which now reads as “the aim of this study was to explore in-depth the personal experiences of footwear in people with gout”.

Methods

There appears to be some dissonance in the underpinning theoretical perspectives and the approaches to data collection and analysis. Perhaps consider replacing the statement on page 3 (line 54-56) "descriptive methodology being the underpinning philosophy" with something like, "This qualitative study sought to gain insight into the subjective experiences of people living with gout in obtaining and wearing footwear. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the participants' unique (or individual) perspectives.” (For example).

Response: This statement has now been changed to read “This qualitative study sought to gain insight into the subjective experiences of people living with gout in obtaining and wearing footwear. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the participants' unique (or individual) perspectives.”

Please reconsider the term "saturation" (page 4 line 58) which is associated with grounded theory methodology. Instead you might consider the ways you achieved information power. Please see:


Response: This statement has been revised to now read “Following each interview, MF evaluated the information power of the interviews to determine that sufficient data was obtained, and
diversity achieved across the sampling framework and to meet the requirements for the study aim and data analysis.”.

Given the chosen methodology, it would be worthwhile considering the notion of researcher reflexivity; that is, what the authors bring to the study, in particular to the collection and analysis of the data. It is not a disadvantage being a podiatrist, but rather than merely stating that the researcher / interviewer is an experienced podiatrist, explaining how this impacted the data collection and analysis. See Braun & Clarke (2006, p.82).

Response: The following statement has been revised “Interviews were conducted by MF, who is an experienced podiatrist and has previously been involved in footwear studies of people with gout”. The following statement has also been added to the data collection sub-heading of the methods “Questions were designed to promote two-way dialogue when exploring areas of interest, with regular summarises of the content discussed shared with the participant during interviews”. Further information has also been provided regarding the approach undertaken for data analysis, which outlines the role of the researcher in the analysis process.

On page 4, the statement "Face-to-face interviews were undertaken …" might fit better in data collection.

Response: this statement has been moved to sit under the data collection subheading

Also on page 4, on line 34, insert the word "held" between "were" and "to".

Response: This sentence now reads “Initial discussions with the participant were held to determine a shared definition of footwear and direct them towards the area of interest.”

With respect to the thematic analysis, you might mean inductive (or abductive) thematic analysis rather than constant comparative (page 5, line 7)?

Response: Constant comparative was used as data collection and analysis were occurring simultaneously and the codes evolved with subsequent details. This is supported by the following statement at the beginning of the data analysis section “Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and iteratively, and it emerged that this created new insights and additional dialogue, which influenced subsequent interviews and analyses.”
To assure readers of the rigour of the study, consider describing the data analysis according to Braun and Clarke's six-phase process, given that is the approach referenced (and followed according to Figure 1).

Response: The following information has been added under the ‘data analysis’ subheading of the methods describing the process undertaken, “Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, anonymised to ensure confidentiality, and analysed after each interview. Transcripts were read and re-read to immerse the researcher in the data. Transcripts were then manually coded by MF, with initial codes and concepts reviewed by a second author (AW). Generated codes were then grouped into potential themes and sub-themes. These were then reviewed to determine a clear distinction between each theme. The final themes were defined, named and agreed upon by all authors. Illustrative quotes from transcripts were selected to provide evidence of each theme.”

Results

It is not indicated in the manuscript where Table 1 will be placed. If not presented in the body of the manuscript, it would be worthwhile briefly describing the participant characteristics in the text. The majority of participants were male, which is likely a reflection of the gout-affected population. Perhaps you could state this.

Response: the location of Table 1 has been added to the manuscript.

Minor comment, consider removing theme 1, theme 2 etc. from the results subheadings.

Response: ‘theme’ has been removed from the subheadings of the results section.

Under the "Knowing what to buy" subheading, the first quote presented is not the most vivid example of this theme, when compared with the other example quotes and leaves the reader feeling a bit confused about the difference between themes 1 and 2. I suggest you consider excluding this quote.

Response: This quote has been removed and replaced with “The shoe looked really primo, but I knew straight away even with the bigger size fitting it was really uncomfortable. I thought, no I can’t put myself through this cause I’ll end up with very sore feet you know and ah so I didn’t buy them”.
Minor comment, on page 8, line 58, replace term disconnect with tension (or something of the like).

Discussion

Response: ‘disconnect’ has been replaced with ‘tension’.

On page 10, line 17, consider replacing the term "good" with "particular". As I understand it, this study explores participants' experiences and does not seek define or link features of footwear to the symptoms of gout. Similarly, please revise the paragraph on page 10 (lines 41-49) to reflect that these were participants' perspectives.

Response: these sentences now read “However, what was additionally revealed is that ‘comfort’ was linked to individual footwear characteristics, supporting the concept that particular footwear characteristics help to reduce the burden of foot pain and disability in those with gout” and “Prior studies have shown the impact of gout flares and tophi on footwear choices. Participants in this study described similar narratives, and we also found that footwear could in turn exacerbate gout symptoms. Having gout meant that participants’ footwear needed to meet their current foot health status rather than their previous footwear expectations”.

The bottom paragraph on page 10 is a little awkward, please revise the sentence beginning "In social settings …"

Response: this sentence now reads “There was an inseparable link between the participant’s footwear and their clothing outfit, meaning footwear decisions for social occasions were often made to the detriment of comfort”.

Minor comments: on page 11 line 17, replace "do" with "did" and lines 55-56 replace "The participant's" with "Participants' ".

Response: both have been changed to reflect this.

Conclusion

Summarises the paper neatly, however I would replace the term "barriers" to "challenges" (line 27).
Response: ‘barriers’ has been replaced with ‘challenges’

Thank you and very best wishes,

Olivia King

Reviewer #2: This is an interesting piece of work that highlights the importance of understanding the challenges and barriers for people obtaining appropriate footwear when they have chronic disease. The study aim aligns itself nicely to a qualitative research approach. However, the overall qualitative paradigm and methods section requires further detail and clarity. Within the methods section the authors state that a descriptive methodology was used as the underpinning philosophy. The reference used [7] to support this research approach does not align with the approach taken and is in itself a research study that focused on a Nominal Group Technique. Typically descriptive methodology primarily focuses on the "what" of the research subject rather than the "why" of the research subject which seems somewhat at odds with the aim of the study to explore in-depth personal experiences. Within a descriptive approach while qualitative methods can be used this is generally undertaken through observation, case studies or surveys because this type of research generally describes a set of observations or the data collected rather than drawing conclusions from the data about why individuals have specific opinions or perceptions. The latter aligns better with a more interpretative paradigm. There is little information provided on how this research approach was chosen to answer the research question.

Response: Thank you for your comments. The reference noted should be Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on research methods: whatever happened to qualitative description? Research in Nursing & Health, 23, 334-40. The aim of the study has been revised to now read “The aim of this study was to explore the personal experiences of footwear in people with gout”. Qualitative description was chosen as the research approach as there is little known about the perspectives of footwear from people with gout. The use of interviews as a method of data collection for qualitative descriptive studies are supported by the Sandelowski paper. In addition, most of the questions from the interview guide were “what” questions which lends itself towards qualitative description.

There is also limited information on how the comparative thematic analysis was undertaken with the information provided by the authors more aligned to an inductive thematic analysis. I would suggest in order the strengthen the methods section of this paper the authors revise the underlying paradigm to ensure there is close alignment with the aim of the study to the
philosophical approach taken. Maybe consider re-framing the manuscript to more of an interpretative paradigm which aligns to the stated aim of the study. But if they chose to do this, the results section would also need careful modified to demonstrate a more interpretative approach where there is clear interpretation of the data and direct excerpts from the participant voices are used to support the authors interpretation and then further unpacked to generate a deeper meaning behind what the participant is indicating. Currently within the results section there doesn't seem to be a deep, rich or thick interpretation of the meaning of the themes which is usually expected in an interpretative paradigm.

Response: The following additional information regarding the constant comparative analysis has been added "Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, anonymised to ensure confidentiality, and analysed after each interview. Transcripts were read and re-read to immerse the researcher in the data. Transcripts were then manually coded by MF, with initial codes and concepts reviewed by a second author (AW). Generated codes were then grouped into potential themes and sub-themes. These were then reviewed to determine a clear distinction between each theme. The final themes were defined, named and agreed upon by all authors. Illustrative quotes from transcripts were selected to provide evidence of each theme". With regards to reframing the manuscript to an interpretive paradigm, we still believe that qualitative descriptive approach is appropriate based on the presentation of the results.

Also in this approach there wouldn't be multiple excerpts to support the same point which is noted on page 6 or page 8 but rather there is greater discussion or interpretation around one excerpt that represents the point being made. However, if the authors believe that a descriptive methodology is what they prefer to present, then consideration to changing the aim of the study needs to undertaken and I would suggest more detailed explanation and information regarding the methodological approach from primary methodology texts would be useful. Once greater detail is provided on the methodological approach the authors would need to ensure that the results section strongly aligns with their chose approach. I would suggest reviewing the following references as a guide to support strengthening this manuscript:


Response: The results have been revised so a single excerpt represents each sub-theme. Additional references have been added to support the descriptive methodology used in this study and analysis processes undertaken, with the revision to the aim described above.