Author’s response to reviews

Title: Altered eating: a definition and framework for assessment and intervention

Authors:

Duika Burges Watson (duika.burges-watson@newcastle.ac.uk)
Sue Lewis (sue.lewis@durham.ac.uk)
Val Bryant (val.m.bryant@gmail.com)
Joanne Patterson (joanne.patterson@newcastle.ac.uk)
Charles Kelly (Charles.Kelly@nuth.nhs.uk)
Rachel Edwards-Stuart (rachel@racheledwardsstuart.com)
Madeleine Murtagh (madeleine.murtagh@bristol.ac.uk)
Vincent Deary (vincent.deary@northumbria.ac.uk)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor

We thank the reviewers for their comments, in particular Rebecca’s Nunds comments have given us clear guidance which we have used to substantially review and improve the paper. Below we will describe how we have responded to the reviewers’ comments.

Reviewer 1:

1. We have moved the ethics approval etc. as suggested by reviewer 1; and in the following response to reviewer 2, we address reviewer 1’s suggestion on making our methodology clearer.

Reviewer 2:

1. “The manuscript lacks a clear direction and I encourage the authors to reconsider the nature of the data they hold and the possible research questions they can answer”:
We have addressed this by making it clear from the start that a key goal of our six year series of survivor lead workshops was to develop a framework for systematically and comprehensively capturing the impact an altered relationship to food had on the life of head and neck cancer survivors. This was a research goal developed with survivors who were clear that current regimes of medical assessment did not address or ameliorate the way an altered relationship to food had changed their lives far beyond the realms of weight and nutrition. We have now made this clearer in the introduction and throughout.

2. “a number of important qualitative studies, which align with the nature of the data in this study, are missing from the literature review. It is suggested that the authors should include a more comprehensive review and critique of the current literature, particularly the qualitative literature, to form a stronger basis and rationale for the study.”

We have addressed this in two ways. We have both updated the literature review, and also critiqued the existing qualitative literature for its lack of patient and public involvement (PPI) in co-production of research questions, methods and findings. This has allowed us to make clear the distinctiveness of our work, which has been commended for its PPI, and we further elaborate upon this in the methodology section.

3. “The qualitative methods have not been adequately described…”

This is the most substantial change and we believe it makes both the extent and the nature of our work, co-produced with head and neck cancer survivors over six years, much clearer. We have made it clear how the use of Video-reflexive ethnography of multi-sensory, embodied food play, in a working kitchen, with chefs, ethnographers, social scientists and survivors as equal participants, enabled access to the lived reality of altered eating in a way that no focus group could. We welcome the opportunity to present this methodology in more detail.

4. “The authors describe the themes and categories as an altered eating framework. It is not clear why they have chosen to present the data in this format”

Again we make it clear in the introduction, methodology and revised discussion that the iterative development of a framework for systematically describing the holistic impact of an altered relationship to food was a goal defined early on by both patient and professional stakeholders as vital to their wellbeing.
The reviewer also notes that we include some results in the discussion. We now make this clear that these “additional” results are in fact examples of how the framework might form the basis for clinical intervention – the ultimate aim of our research programme. However the aim of this stage was the development of an assessment framework, and the application of it as intervention is the next phase of our ongoing programme, so it felt better to put this speculative element in the discussion.

We do hope the reviewers feel we have clarified the issues they raised, and we welcome the chance to make the nature of our research programme clearer.