Reviewer’s report

Title: "Is all the stuff about neurons necessary?" The development of lay summaries to disseminate findings from the Newcastle Cognitive Function after Stroke (COGFAST) study

Version: 0 Date: 05 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Paul Manners

Reviewer's report:

I thought this was a really well written and useful article. I enjoyed reading it and found the inclusion of examples of the lay summaries 'before and after' helpful. I think that the article makes a helpful contribution to discussions or how to write a good lay summary. My only concern is about the framing of the article. It raises some important questions which aren't currently in scope but which would I think help to take this work forwards. The first of these concerns the approach taken. While this was thoughtful and clearly done with great skill, there is a long tradition of 'user testing' which has been developed in the field of web development which isn't referenced here but which would I think have opened up some useful alternative / additional approaches to involving the public in the process of developing the website and summaries. Another term for this is 'usability': here is a US website which provides an overview of some of the methods: https://www.usability.gov/ I think there is a real sophistication now in such methods which could really help people with the challenge of developing such resources in the future. I wonder if it would be helpful to reference this in the discussion section - making the point that the focus group approach is a first step, but that there is significant potential to draw on other methods?

My second concern is that the article frames the challenge as being about 'comprehensibility' whereas I felt that the challenge is broader than that: as someone who has a mother who has had a stroke and is living with dementia I was intrigued to find out more about the research and how it might help us make sense of her condition, so I read the summaries with great interest. I found they explained the science well but left me asking 'so what?'. I suggest that focusing on 'comprehensibility' alone is too narrow - it is vital to also address purpose and motivation for reading.

I wanted to share these reflections as I think they would help to take the work forward. Congratulations on writing such a thoughtful and lucid account. It really got me thinking!
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