Reviewer's report

Title: Finding and engaging patients and the public to work collaboratively on an acute infection microbiology research public panel

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Reviewer: Anne McKenzie

Reviewer's report:

This paper will add to the body of knowledge around the difficulties in finding people with an interest in working collaboratively with laboratory based researchers particularly when the subject is very general i.e. acute infections. It is an interesting paper which I consider should be published but suggest the authors consider addressing and/or expanding the following points:

As the authors acknowledge the subject matter is an area that people do not necessarily relate to and this is borne out by the lack of responses to the large number of flyers and pamphlets distributed across a broad range of organisations and events. It would be beneficial to explain more fully how the team remained motivated in the face of nil responses to mail-outs and advertising to 1700+ people.

Also there is no mention of the use of social media in the recruitment process. As the use of social media platforms i.e. FaceBook is widespread in the community and a very effective communication tool, it would be useful to understand why this was not used?

Methods:

I query why the team did not seek advice from patients and members of the public about how to recruit members for the panel. For me it was an important and missing piece of information that requires comment about why this was not done

Discussion:

I think more could be discussed about the value and importance of building and maintaining relationships with patients and the public. This is highlighted by the difference in responses when personal connections were made to people who had either been involved previously with the researchers or they had a personal interest as a patient with an infection. There is an opportunity to explore how the relationships contributed to the ultimate success of establishing the panel. Given there is little published on this topic for people who may only have a on-off
interaction with a health service i.e. with an acute infection, sharing the experiences of the researchers in this endeavour is important.

Conclusion

In this section it states seeking advice was paramount and yet there is nowhere that the researchers sort advice from patients and members of the public about the best way to recruit to a panel. This seems to be a glaring omission and I feel it should be at least explained why this was not considered of done.

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