Reviewer’s report

Title: Meet the Researchers: an alternative method of engaging patients with research in mesothelioma.

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Reviewer: Matthew Baker

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and well written piece of work that reports on patient and public engagement activities in the field of mesothelioma research. The authors premise their account on the assertion that sustained patient involvement is problematic given the typical mesothelioma disease trajectory.

Their practice has elaborated an engagement methodology (the populations that they have engaged are not specified clearly but appear to be lay and mixed and include patients) based on informality and the simplification of complex research information.

Much of what they describe and advocate by way of methodological tips for running groups that provide for an improved quality of interaction between lay populations appears excellent.

The problem with the paper lies with an ambiguity revolving around the practices of 'engagement' and 'involvement'. Much of the paper is concerned with effecting engagement and finding more effective ways for researchers to communicate with interested lay populations in a process of information transfer. On a couple of occasions there is reference to partnership and the benefits of patient and public perspectives informing research. The authors attempt to subsume these elements within their proposition without providing evidence of this being attempted or of it having occurred. This sleight of hand is compounded when they draw comparisons between their approach and that of the NCRI Dragons' Den model where the emphasis is placed upon partnership, problem solving and co-production.

This problem is not insurmountable. It does require that the authors provide a clear differentiation between 'engagement' and 'involvement' and clarify the boundaries of their work in this respect and be more precise in their nomenclature. They should also provide a clearer description of the populations that they have engaged. The very many successful techniques that they describe are transferable. There is room for the authors to speculate on the ways in which their methods could be applied when pursuing the objectives of involvement and co-production as distinct from those of engagement and information transfer.

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