Reviewer’s report

Title: Using Qualitative Health Research Methods to Improve Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement in Research

Version: 0 Date: 24 Jul 2018

Reviewer: Delia Muir

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for taking the time to prepare this paper. I really like that fact that you are drawing on existing methodologies / theories and considering how they can support Patient and Public Involvement / Engagement (PPIE). In the UK, I think we have sometimes been guilty of 're-inventing the wheel' with PPIE, rather than drawing on existing evidence and learning from other fields. It’s great to see that your team is trying to avoid more duplication. I think the discussion around reflexivity is particularly relevant to PPIE.

I would encourage you to think more critically about the challenges of implementing qualitative research techniques within PPIE. For example:

- In my experience, some researchers still confuse PPIE and qual research (particularly those from a quantitative background). As you mention, this is an important distinction due to ethical approval processes. There is a chance that applying the language qual research to PPIE could add to that confusion. The use of research language could potentially reinforce the 'researcher-subject dynamic' which you talk about on page 8. How would you suggest combatting that?

- When using a technique such as a Delphi, at what point do patients (or other stakeholders) more from helping to shape research, to being participants in a qualitative study? How can we help researchers to think critically about these boundaries and avoid qual research being badged as PPIE in order to avoid ethical review?

- I have some ethical concerns about using dense description within a PPIE context. Patients involved may want to be identified (e.g. named on papers or reports) in order to acknowledge and reward their contributions. Therefore dense description may inadvertently identify things about their lives that they do not want sharing publicly. You also make an assumption that patient contributors will be happy to share these details with the team and the wider world. In my experience that is not always the case. I agree that some PPIE reporting lacks useful context. However I would like to see more critical reflection on how context can be provided in a safe and ethical way, which will not discourage people from being involved.

I think that drawing more on literature around ethics and participatory research (where the lines between researchers and participants are often blurred) may help with addressing my concerns above.
Also there is a minor typo on the second line of the abstract - needs a comma after 'decision-making'.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license ([http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.
I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal