Reviewer's report

Title: Hearing the voices of older adult patients: processes and findings to inform health services research

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Reviewer: Katherine Cowan

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes an interesting process that has the potential to be useful to other researchers who want to involve and engage frail elderly people in their research. My comments mainly relate to where I think the article could provide greater clarity and detail.

Plain English Summary:

- I didn't understand the reference to 'reported priorities' in the first sentence.

- Final two lines on page 1: this sentence implies that the priorities about independence were unexpected, but I don't think that was the case. Also, it isn't clear if you mean priorities for research or service delivery.

Abstract:

- Under the objectives you don't mention anything about identifying priorities, so this feels disconnected from the results section.

Introduction and background:

- Page 3: the aim is stated much more clearly here. Was the aim to influence research and service development at a national level (ie England)? I wasn't clear later on in the paper if it was more of a regional or perhaps city-based focus (see also page 5, final paragraph).

Design:

- Are you able to give more detail on the 'established NHS PPIE group'? Were they from your area?
- How were the existing and known groups identified? I think some practical detail on how you went about identifying groups, would be useful for other researchers for whom this is a new challenge. (The detail on page 7 about the types of groups approached is great.)

Participants and attention to diversity:

- Were the people that you engaged with older and frail? How did you define this? Had they been recently discharged from hospital? I'm wondering if people had to meet certain criteria for you to want to talk with them.

Findings:

- I was quite confused about the priorities - it wasn't clear to me if they were all priorities for research (what kind of research?) or for service design/improvement (where?). Also, are they in ranked order, and if so, how did you measure their relative importance? The first line refers to the 'experiences of NHS patients' - do you mean 'frail older NHS patients'? How have you turned their experiences into priorities? I think the intro here needs more explanation and clearer parameters.

- Presumably the quotes have been taken from your notes (I don't think you recorded)?

- Priority 5 - maybe rephrase to make it clear that it's about communication processes between hospital staff and patients/families.

- Priority 6 - 'research priorities' - again, I'm confused, were the previous priorities not research priorities? Did you specifically discuss research with the participants (it's not on your topic guide), or have you inferred where research can address the unmet needs they've expressed? I think this needs to be clearer.

Discussion:

- page 12, para 2 - it might be worth being clear that the JLA Dementia Partnership priority on independence was the top priority identified by patients, carers and clinicians.

- I wondered what else you had learned from the process and what had been challenging. Some of the literature you've referenced about involving older people is quite dated, so this is an opportunity to share some fresh, practical intelligence.
Conclusion:

- I noted that the first sentence is the first time you've directly articulated that the paper includes 3 examples of PPIE - I think this is a strength and could be mentioned earlier on to give a stronger sense of structure/progression to the reader.

- The final sentence is quite strident! The qualitative researcher in me is thinking you should couch it in 'having the potential to...'.

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