Reviewer's report

Title: Engaging Patients and the Public in Health Research: Experiences, Perceptions and Training Needs among Manitoba Health Researchers

Version: 0 Date: 16 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Rachel Matthews

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for submitting this interesting work about the experiences, perceptions and training needs among Manitoba Health Researchers. You have obviously considered the challenges of supporting researchers to involve patients and the public and designed a method to understand local issues in more depth. I assume the findings will be used to design suitable and acceptable training and developmental opportunities.

I offer these reflections which may lead you to revise and reframe or place emphasis differently to strengthen the manuscript.

1. Internationally, there is already a reasonable amount of literature which describes the difficulties and anxieties experienced by researchers when contemplating PPI and you do reference recent publications. My concern is that your findings may have the most resonance locally in your province. You could revisit the findings and consider if there is anything that you have uniquely uncovered that will be of interest to a wider audience. Without this, I felt I was not learning anything particularly new.

2. The background could be strengthened by considering how you use the literature to introduce your research. The paragraph starting at line 34 on page 6 seems to really speak about what you are getting at and I wonder if that’s worth bringing in earlier? I like the point about policy outpacing evidence. I wanted to know more about that as I would agree that there is a disconnect between evidence, policy and practice development. Perhaps you could expand and explain further? I would also revisit your explanation in the paragraph staring at line 9 on page 7 of what the research is attempting to do. I was confused wondering are you seeking to identify needs or working out what could address the gaps? Your manuscript title suggest you are collecting data about three different aspects which doesn't align with this paragraph or perhaps you are saying something different at this point.

2 Methods. I can see that you spent time designing a lengthy questionnaire. I wasn't completely certain whether you had used or adapted existing validated tools? The questionnaire is divided into sections to address the 3 main areas of knowledge and experience, perceptions, needs and strategies. Your recruitment strategy could be summarised in a table by phase. This could help to clarify your target sample and the changes you made in your recruitment strategy.
3. Descriptive statistics is not my area of expertise, however in taking advice from data analysts in my team, I might question whether your comparatively small numbers necessitated the statistical analysis you used. Other reviewers may be able to comment further.

4. Data interpretation. I was intrigued that you involved the Patient and Public Engagement Collaborative Partnership to 'validate the findings and outline future directions'. I wondered if there would be a fundamental difference in perspective and perception? I wanted to know if they were involved in the initial idea and design of the study as well as this stage? A table showing the timelines of the project could be helpful. Their input described on p16 contains some really useful clues about what might need to change especially the reflection on p17 line 58 which suggested learning together. This for me links back to the policy-evidence-practice gap you mention earlier in the manuscript. In my experience learning together offers real rewards.

5. In the discussion I would reconsider the points you want to draw out from your findings. There is unlikely to be a one size fits all solution so your findings point to an experience specific menu which takes account of the stage people are at in their career. Involvement is very experiential, how could that be supported? Could more experienced researchers act as peer support? Is there scope for joint training?

Overall, you have conducted a comprehensive piece of work that provides a local benchmark.

However, greater explanation, focus and clarity in the text and the presentation of some information in tables might help. I'd be interested to know if you could repeat the exercise following training interventions or whether co-designing and co-evaluation training/development/support might provide better real time data about what helps build capacity and confidence and if that converts to better practice and more involvement at different levels.

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Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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