Reviewer’s report

Title: Value and learning from carer involvement in a cluster randomised controlled trial and process evaluation - Organising Support for Carers of Stroke Survivors (OSCARSS)

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Reviewer: Julia Jones

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written paper that I enjoyed reading. It is an important paper for as the authors rightly say, there are currently few articles that report the involvement of users and carer in RCTs, particularly the involvement of carers. So this article will be extremely useful for research teams and their research user groups regarding how to document and report the process of involvement in RCTs.

I have a couple of comments:

1) Ethics - I acknowledge that Involvement in research does not require research ethics approval, as the authors state in at the end of the article in the ethical approval section. However, the evaluation of the PCPI reported in this article does read very much like a piece of research to me, with verbatim recording of discussions/interviews, thematic data analysis and reporting using quotations from the interviews (p7-8). I therefore wonder whether this evaluation was covered by the wider ethical approval for the main study? Or whether the research team consulted with an ethics committee who said that ethical approval was not required for this evaluation? I feel that as a reader, this information is missing. Or if the authors are clear that ethical approval was not required for the method of evaluation undertaken, then a brief justification of this would be useful.

2) In this article you report both the benefits and challenges of the process of involvement, as has been reported in previous accounts of PPI in studies. This discussion is really interesting and useful. However, at the moment the abstract just reports on the positive aspects of involvement and not any challenges. I think the abstract and plain English summary should have a sentence or two regarding the challenges, such as the time commitment and emotional aspects of involvement, as reported in the article. This will provide a more balanced account of the findings for readers who sometimes just read the abstract in the first instance.

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Quality of written English
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