Author’s response to reviews

Title: Patient and Public Involvement in doctoral research: Reflections and experiences of the PPI contributors and researcher

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Dear Editors and Reviewers

Thank you for your time in reviewing our submission. We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the reviewer’s comments, which have proven extremely useful in revising this manuscript. We have now revised the manuscript offering additional information and context.

Below you will find a detailed response to each comment presented by the reviewers and these changes are highlighted in the revised manuscript.

We would be happy to provide further clarification about the changes if necessary and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Shoba Dawson

Reviewer 1

Reviewer: This is a quite well written paper, but the main issue is that I don't see anything innovative here which has a particular interest to anyone with more than passing interest in PPI. The issues which you identify are quite well known to anyone who has engaged in PPI in research. Although you are quite right that there is an issue that PPI is often not considered
in all elements of the research process, this is quite well known to many researchers and you do not offer any particularly interesting insights into why this is, or innovative solutions as to how to encourage others to take a more robust approach to PPI within research, other than you found it useful. The narrative approach is perfectly reasonable, but the insights provided do not to me, show anything that I would not have expected.

In the end the take home message seems to be, do PPI throughout the research process and it can be very valuable (which is laudable of course and I thoroughly agree) but as someone who is very committed to PPI, this paper doesn't give me any particularly interesting insights or ideas of how or why this should be done. Well done for being so committed to making sure PPI was a part of your doctoral research, but I think you have probably just done what most other doctoral researchers are (or at least should) be doing. I'm not sure this is innovative or interesting enough for publication, but I am certain that the results of your doctoral study itself will be.

Response: We agree with the reviewer that the issues presented are well-known. However, the purpose of this paper is not to discuss similarities or differences between PPI in doctoral research and wider research, but to give an example of how PPI in doctoral research should be undertaken. This is important as there is scant evidence in the current literature on the researcher’s experiences of conducting research, how different decisions influenced the study, outcomes as a result of these decisions, and personal accounts of researcher and PPI contributors regarding involvement. Therefore, this paper bridges an important gap in the literature. To ensure that this is explicitly stated in the revised manuscript, we have reflected on why this paper is novel and how this will facilitate learning for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in the lay abstract (lines 37-38, 40-42) abstract (lines 62-67) and expanded the introduction (lines 132-141), discussion (lines 495-503) and conclusion (lines 625-628 & lines 631-635).

Reviewer: When considering doctoral research, you could have considered some of the power differentials between PPI members and an early career researcher, and how this is different from those when experienced researchers are involved i.e. the power differentials may be less evident and therefore render PPI activity more of an equal relationship than is possible in other research contexts, and what the benefits of this might be. But you don’t appear to have considered any of these more interesting insights which might have been less obvious.

Response: Efforts were made from the outset to ensure that PPI-researcher relationship was an equal one. We spent the time to build relationships with PPI contributors that enhanced the quality of these relationships. Further, expectations from both researchers and PPI contributors managed from the outset. These factors contributed to avoiding tensions in terms of who had control over research enabling to rebalance power within the research process (lines 564-566). This is further highlighted by how meetings involved honest and open conversations with PPI contributors being critical friends (lines 459-461) and how the involvement outcomes were an end product of a joint effort (lines 569-573).
Reviewer 3

Reviewer: Another useful reference to include is the following: 
Coupe Patient and public involvement in doctoral research: Impact, resources and recommendations. Health Expectations, Epub ahead of print, DOI: 10.1111/hex.12976

Response: Thank you for suggesting this reference. This has now been included in the revised version of the manuscript in the discussion section (line 495).

Reviewer: the research project was about PPI - what are the implications of that in terms of who to involve - whose experiential knowledge is relevant - is it different to involving people in health research?

Response: As requested by the reviewer, we have now illustrated how the role of different experiential knowledge and its relevance to the research project influenced the researcher’s experiential learning. We have discussed this briefly in the section ‘who was involved?’ (lines 162-174). We also present detailed descriptions of the extent to which this influenced decisions and how, without such knowledge, the said decisions would not have been made. To illustrate this further, we have now provided an example from the study to articulate how the involvement of additional PPI contributors (those with extensive PPI experience) influenced and had an impact on developing the systematic review protocol. Therefore, suggesting that different types of experiential knowledge are relevant in different contexts. We also discuss how involving various PPI contributors with varying levels of PPI experience was appropriate during different stages of the research project. Finally, we highlight how we valued experiential knowledge throughout the research project and measures taken to acknowledge and recognise this by examining it in the researcher’s reflection on involving PPI contributors and impact section (lines 461-471 & lines 474-480), and the discussion section (lines 517-538). The need to consider different experiential expertise of PPI contributors has also been added to Table 3 (appendix) as a recommendation.