Reviewer’s report


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Reviewer: Marie Falahee

Reviewer's report:

I enjoyed reading this well written and well presented article. The authors provide an interesting analysis of UK newspaper reporting relating to rheumatoid arthritis, and a description of the language used in such articles. The rationale for this work is well developed, and given that previous research has shown that public understanding of this condition is often limited and may contribute to delayed help seeking it is important to understand how the media may contribute to public awareness of RA in order to identify opportunities for positive intervention.

Patient involvement is a particular strength of this paper; it is both refreshing and encouraging to see rheumatology research that is successfully led by a service user and this approach should be commended. The authors state on page 6 (line 151-153) that "the original impetus for the study was the frustration of people who live with RA about society's lack of awareness about rheumatoid arthritis and its daily impact on people with the disease". This is a laudable rationale for the research undertaken, but needs to be contextualized. For example, was this the frustration of the service user leading the study and/or other patient representatives, or was this the experience of the clinicians involved in the research, or has this been demonstrated in previous research (with supporting references; for example this was a theme in Falahee, M., Simons, G., Buckley, C. D., Hansson, M., Stack, R. J. and Raza, K. (2017), Patients' Perceptions of Their Relatives' Risk of Developing Rheumatoid Arthritis and of the Potential for Risk Communication, Prediction, and Modulation. Arthritis Care & Research, 69: 1558-1565. doi:10.1002/acr.23179), or do all of the above apply?

Some minor suggestions and comments are listed below for consideration, but the main issue I have relates to the description of the analytic approach. Whilst the authors describe adopting a constructivist approach using grounded theory techniques, the resulting themes are somewhat descriptive, rather than interpretative. Insightful interpretation of the results is provided in the discussion section, but the thematic analysis as currently presented in the results section itself seems to lend itself more to a realist rather than a constructivist perspective. The presentation of quantitative information about the number of times each code within a theme is cited is unorthodox for a constructivist study, and more akin to content analysis techniques. Such a presentation of results may in fact enhance the accessibility of this work to readers from a quantitative research background and is appropriate to achieve the research objectives, but the
discrepancy between the approach described and the results presented could usefully be addressed.

P5 (line 12): Rephrase to describe a content analysis of newspaper articles about gout; rather than a content analysis of gout itself.

P5 (lines 123-125): It would be useful to further emphasise how the article described here by Hanson et al and the current study are different, given that there is a degree of overlap in the material covered. The authors correctly state that the Hanson paper was restricted to reporting about new medical treatments for RA (though in fact it would be more accurate to say the focus was on reporting about research on new treatments) but could emphasise a little more why it is important to broaden the scope of this previous work as undertaken in the current study, or other ways in which this study adds to existing findings (for example, led by patient researcher).

P7 (line 178-179): It is possible that some relevant articles might be omitted because neither the headline nor the lead paragraph contain the phrase "rheumatoid arthritis". For example early paragraphs might focus on the burden of "arthritis". Therefore it would be helpful to provide justification for this approach, or to acknowledge this as a potential limitation in the discussion section.

P8 (lines 199-200): State the percentage of coded articles that were cross-checked

P8 (line 201): Unless the cross-checking procedure involved blind independent coding by multiple researchers/stakeholders it's probably fairer to state that the procedure was designed to limit, rather than minimise researcher subjectivity.

P8 (line 202): The process of member checking usually refers to validity checking by research participants. It could be argued that other stakeholder groups would constitute more appropriate 'members' in this context; e.g. patient / non-patient newspaper readers; journalists etc. Therefore this approach would benefit from further justification.

P15 (lines 378-381): There are other ways in which the current findings align with the previous paper by Hanson et al - for example the negative media portrayal of the 'burden' of RA. It would be useful to highlight how the current study has extended on previous findings.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess
Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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