

Reviewer's report

Title: Engaging with information to support self-management from the patients' perspective: a qualitative synthesis

Version: 3 **Date:** 30 June 2008

Reviewer: Nicky Britten

Reviewer's report:

1 Minor essential revision

This paper aims to synthesise the results of 4 qualitative studies undertaken by the authors in the general field of self-management. The research question is 'What influences patient engagement with information to support self management for chronic conditions?' This wording is given in the middle of the methods section, but it would be better if the question was also stated at the end of the background section. The question is an important one, especially as it refers to several chronic conditions and not just one.

2 Minor essential revision

The authors use several terms to describe their work: qualitative synthesis (in the title); meta synthesis (in the abstract and methods); synthesis (in the methods and results) and analysis (in the methods and results). I think that it would be helpful to use fewer terms and to define them more precisely.

3 Minor essential revision

Still on definitions, the paper refers to self-care (in the abstract), self-management (in the methods), self-care support (in the methods) and supported self-management (in the results). It would be helpful to have definitions of all these terms as they are also (like the terms associated with synthesis) used in different ways by different authors.

4 Discretionary revision

The data for this paper consist of the findings and original data (as re-analysed by the authors) of 4 primary studies. It would be helpful to have more information about these four studies particularly their main findings, even if they are not especially focused on information.

5 Minor essential revision

It would also be helpful to have some consideration of the scope of these four studies. They deal with four chronic conditions, none of which is normally life threatening. At some point in the paper it would be useful if the authors reflected on the relevance of their findings for other chronic conditions.

6 Discretionary revision

The methods used seem appropriate, but more details are required. For readers

unfamiliar with qualitative synthesis, the terms 'second order constructs' and 'third order interpretations' probably require explanation.

7 Minor essential revision

The methods entail the use of 4 key concepts arising from the secondary analysis; 2 themes; and 5 key factors or propositions (confusingly referred to as key concepts in the abstract). The identification of the 4 key concepts from the secondary analysis is reasonably well described. However the identification of the 2 themes (ontological status and experience of the condition in everyday life) is not well described and it is not clear at which point in the synthesis they emerged.

8 Minor essential revision

The 5 propositions (key factors) are described very briefly and without very much supporting data from the primary studies. The links between the key concepts, and the themes and propositions are not clear. For example, is there a link between the concept 'Type of prior information seeking' and the proposition 'Perception and awareness of alternative possibilities'? It is not clear that the sequence of propositions does add up to a line of argument. What is the relationship between the 2 themes, and how do the 5 propositions contribute to this relationship? Is there any sense in which the propositions have a chronological or sequential relationship to one another? Is it being argued that all the propositions apply to all patients? Is it possible to provide a more explicit mapping between the propositions and the characteristics of the different chronic conditions?

9 Discretionary revision

The main methodological innovation of this work is the fact the synthesisers were also the authors of the primary studies. I would like to see some more reflection on this aspect of the work. Did the authors have any difficulty in synthesising their own work, and do they consider that their synthesis is stronger because of their greater familiarity with the primary studies?

Overall I think that this is an important piece of work from a strong team who are leading the field of self-management. Their attempt to synthesise their own work is important both in terms of building up a more comprehensive evidence base, and in applying the technique of meta ethnography in new ways. However I think that more details need to be given of the second phase of this work, to show how the line of argument links to the secondary analysis, and to illuminate the line of argument itself.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.