Reviewer's report

Title: The recurring recruitment challenge in primary care research

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Reviewer: Jonathan Graffy

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Review:

The authors report on interviews with and a self-report survey completed by investigators and project managers with six primary care research studies conducted in Ontario and Quebec, Canada. Although the title given is “The recurring recruitment challenge in primary care research”, as I read the article, I was surprised to find that it related to recruiting practices or physicians, but not participants.

Little detail is given on the numbers of investigators or project managers interviewed, or the methods of analysis. I note that the qualitative analysis appears to have been based on notes taken by the researcher, rather than taped and transcribed interviews. Interview schedules and the self-report survey were not included in the article.

All of the projects were “primary care development” studies, focussed on preventive services or quality comparisons at a time of health reform. Thus the practitioners were the object of study, rather than patients. I wondered whether the views of the practitioners towards the research projects might have influenced their willingness to respond, but this study did not seem to explore the perspectives of the potential physician recruits.

The results section reports the perspectives of the interviewees, but the analysis appears to have been essentially descriptive. Little use was made of quantitative data. Also it was unclear which approaches the investigators considered had been the most effective. In the discussion, these findings were compared with other literature, but not developed as fully as they might have been. In a way the discussion merely reiterates the problem researchers face in engaging clinicians, rather than offering solutions.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

• The title should be revised to refer to make clear that it relates to recruiting practitioners (or practices, physicians etc), and should point to the specifics of the study, rather than claiming a general relevance.

• The methods and participants recruited should be described in more detail. (See above).

• The analysis should be developed further to go beyond reporting the
perspectives of the interviewees. (In the abstract they say that the recruitment processes described "offer several lessons" to advance recruitment but at the end of the paper I was left uncertain what these lessons were.)

- Some further quantitative data could be included (eg sample size for the recruitment percentage given.) Other data may also be available, but the investigators will have a better grasp of this.
- The role of research networks should be discussed more fully in the discussion.
- The limitation that these were essentially service development, rather than clinical research with patients needs to be referred to in the discussion.
- The relationship between the study team and the projects should be described. Were any involved in the projects studied, or the funding agency, or are they independent? If there was an overlap of roles, this might alter the statement on conflicts of interest.

Minor Essential Revisions

- In the abstract, I would like the first sentence to call for “further evidence”, rather than “further discussion”.
- In table 1 there is a typo in the data on project A: “difficult to get passed reception” should be “past”
- The authors need to be consistent in referring to projects by name or the letter assigned.

Discretionary Revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests