Reviewer’s report

Title: Engaging participants in a complex intervention trial in Australian General Practice

Version: 1 Date: 5 May 2008

Reviewer: Larry Green

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Major Compulsory Revisions

I tried to break these out, but there is really only one message.

This is more of an opinion piece (than a qualitative research analysis) about a set of experiences and what this experience means, formulating lessons learned. It is quite interesting and it is pertinent, especially to practice-based researchers working on improving quality.

GENERAL COMMENTS

It is not ready for publication.

The formatting and structure of the paper is something of a hybrid of a research paper and an editorial, achieving neither format successfully. If it is to be presented as a research paper, it should be more systematic and structured with more clarity about the methods. If it is more of a synthesis of experience, the abstract is not quite appropriate as presented and it should say as much and be written more as an editorial.

The claims made, overall, are plausible and based on “lived-experience” suitable for editorial/opinion pieces. However, the claims probably over-reach the methods as implied or described from a typical research perspective.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

1. Page 4, “The development process and study protocol” section is possibly the place to start a methods section, if desired. This section needs to explain more of the what and how. Figure one notwithstanding, there is no presentation of data and how they were acquired for THIS manuscript. (It lists steps taken to execute the health service trial over past 3 years and is silent on the analytic plan/approach used to produce this study/manuscript.)

2. Page 4 next to last sentence: what does this mean? “. . . required arms-length recruitment of both practices and in particular patients.”

3. Page 5, “The recruitment” section. This is a nice example of what is involved in obtaining and measuring the REACH of an intervention into/with practices. Would be nice to provide some data here, vs e.g. “relatively small proportion.”
4. Page 6, same section: The claim of “more likely” needs to be undergirded with information about what is being compared. And this section blends/confuses recruitment and retention, both important considerations.

5. Page 7, top 10 lines in discussion section. There are a lot of issues raised here that are not really developed/argued/defended. The basis of the statements doesn’t seem to be made in what has come before or via references. For example, what is the basis for the claim that engaging practice in research “clearly needs to begin with Divisions of General Practice . . . ?” “Engagement of Divisions is likely to be enhanced if they are formally recognized as research partners.”

6. Page 7 rest. The pattern continues with claims of must and likelihoods, need, and shoulds. “It is vitally important to minimize the time between recruitment and initiating . . . “ “Research methods must respond flexibly . . . “ These claims may be entirely appropriate, but these types of statements lack foundation in what has come before in this manuscript. 

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.