Reviewer's report

Title: The consultants' role in the referring process with GPs - partners or adjudicators? A qualitative study

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Reviewer: Christie Cabral

Reviewer's report:

An interesting study and generally well written paper

1. Major Compulsory Revisions

1.1 Results section on quality of referrals - very interesting but it's difficult to understand the 'good' 'insufficient' & 'bad' - are these categories? If so how described or what are the characteristics associated with each? If just commonly used descriptors, need to make that clearer. I was left wondering what was the difference between 'insufficient' and 'bad' referrals?

Later on (p7 ln19) refers to referrals that were 'insufficient or missing' - should that be 'missing information' (that is then set out in following list) rather than just missing? Also what is the difference between insufficient & missing information? Patient’s motivation should be part of same sentence as other elements that might be missing.

1.2 p8 ln 13 - final sentence states that consultants said GPs should do more testing - I wondered if you knew why i.e. was it to give better info when referring or GPs to make better judgement about whether or not to refer - would be interesting to clarify this if possible

1.3 p8 ln14 - This paragraph seems to be about the process of prioritizing not the quality of referrals & would work better in next section

1.4 p9 ln1 national guidelines were described as insufficient - would be interesting to know in what way

1.5 p9 3rd paragraph: there seems to be some confusion here between what the consultants felt & what patients felt - since all data from consultants, need to make clear these are consultant’s views, beliefs, feelings (even when what they believe patients feel)

1.6 Communication - a very interesting section but key messages need to be clearer. Title & opening sentence appears to refer to communication between consultants & GPs but the data appears to be consultant's views on how GPs ought to communicate with them & barriers to their communication with GPs (without any acknowledgement that GPs might face exactly the same barriers - which is interesting if it is the case but needs to be brought out more clearly).
1.7 In p10 ln9-15 there is a quote described as a 'personal opinion' - the authors need to interpret this 'opinion' & say what they think this consultant is really saying. Also, it was not clear that this section was about communication - is it not more about quality of referrals?

1.8 p10 final paragraph - this doesn't appear to be about communication but about delineation of roles - perhaps the section entitled 'The communication between GPs & consultants' needs to be renamed something like 'The relationship between ...'

1.9 whole result section would be strengthened by making it clearer what makes a good or a bad referral - & drawing out implications for practice more clearly

2. Minor Essential Revisions

2.1 p4 ln 1: this sentence bit hard to understand - is the point that having a well-functioning primary care system is important to all health services? - should replace with clearer sentence

2.2 p4 ln3 between most & medical insert 'of the'

2.3 p4 ln9 after decade delete comma & insert 'and'

2.4 p4 ln21 insert either after consultants

2.5 p5 ln3 need to change 'is either' because more than one option - could use 'can be'

2.6 p6 ln2 - not sure what is meant by a 'strategic sample' - appears it might be purposive sample - if this is so would be a better term to use because it is more widely recognised.

2.7 p7 ln5 the meaning of the final sentence is unclear - needs rewording

2.8 p11 ln9 (& also in abstract) - not clear what is meant by better communication being 'meaningful' - need to reword this (was it 'valued' or 'wanted'?)

2.9 p11 ln9 - final clause should read 'consultants believe could reduce referral rates'

2.10 p11 ln12 replace 'confirmed' with 'shared'

2.11 p13 ln19 This paper is only about consultants - so conclusion can't be about GPs

3. Discretionary Revisions

3.1 p4 ln3 replace a with both?

3.2 p4 ln6 insert colon after process?

3.3 p4 ln16 internationally instead of international?

3.4 p6 ln4 replace full stop with comma in 350,000

3.5 p9 ln5 replace of with from
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests