Reviewer's report

Title: Approaches to Quality Improvement in Nursing Homes: Lessons Learned from the Six-State Pilot of CMS' Nursing Home Quality Initiative

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Reviewer: Nicholas Castle

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

This paper describes the lessons learned from the six Quality Improvement Organizations and Nursing Home Compare (NHC). The paper is easy to read and very well written. I feel that it the following may improve the paper:

1. As a general comment, more detail is needed. Many comments are provided that are not yet supported. More detail is given below.
2. A further general comment is that the recent GAO report on NHC should be referenced. It provides a good background to your study.
3. The authors also do not provide any limitations. The GAO report cites several of these for NHC. Some also exist for QI - for example you mention using quality measures for QI, are these alone adequate to improve nursing home care? Or is it simply the case for many nursing homes that any QI would be better than what currently exists.
4. Methods: "education on pain and pressure ulcers" - why these two areas and not others. Who provided the education?
5. Methods: "education on quality improvement techniques." - what techniques, how much education, how many sessions. Was this a particular "type of QI", e.g., rapid QI?
6. Methods: "the database was queried." - this tells the reader little. What was queried, how many times, etc. Any statistical tests used, any frequency of observations recorded?
7. Results: "new nursing home data" - does this refer to the MDS. Is this new?
8. Results: SSA were contacted. - Who was contacted, and how often?
9. Results: "tried to identify a physician" - did this succeed? In how many cases was this successful, any advice on how to do this?
10. Results: "nursing homes have many practical tips to share" - these should be included in the manuscript (e.g., as Table 2). I think this is probably more important than Table 1.
11. Results: "Corporate rules and protocols add another type of regulation" - I would suggest adding more detail. Do chain facilities have more support or less? It would seem that chains would be more
able to help in QI activities. If this is not the case, can you explain why?

12. Results "conflicts between regulations and QI" - again I would suggest another Table. This is a blanket statement and deserves some attention. Pinpointing these conflicts to me seems as important as the information currently given in Table 1.

13. Results: Turnover is listed as important. Did top management turnover influence your initiative in any way?

14. Table 1: many items in the Table seem self-evident (although this may be part of the point of providing this Table). How many states used each approach? How do some of these recommendations get operationalized. For example, turnover of staff?

In summary, I think this paper has considerable merit. To my knowledge it is the first in this area. I think the authors provide a nice framework for the reader, but need to give the reader more information. All of the comments provided are minor (discretionary revisions). I do not see any areas to "cut" from the current text, and given space limitations I would suggest the authors address the comments they are able given the space.

**Competing interests:**

None declared.