Reviewer’s report

Title: Patient perceptions of safety and quality of maternity clinical handover

Version: 3 Date: 27 May 2011

Reviewer: Mandie Scamell

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you giving me this second opportunity to review this interesting paper on clinical handover within the context of maternity care. The authors alterations in this version have cleared up several of the comments I raised in the previous review and in my opinion the clarity of the paper overall has been improved by these amendments.

Unfortunately, there are still a few minor issues that deserve attention and which have not been addressed in this redrafting.

1. The most serious of which is the disconnect between the research design and the claims being made in the paper. I realise that I had previously borrowed too heavily from the syntax of quantitative research when I raised this issue in my previous review (point 1 & 5). My understanding is that this paper reports on a study investigating women’s perceptions of handovers which may or may not include ideas around safety. This would mean therefore that the research design cannot offer insight into the quality or safety of the handovers being described since this is not captured in the data. The heading on page 7 suggests quite a different emphasis and this is an assumption which still crops up in several places in the paper (e.g. page 1 para 5; page 2 para 5 etc.).

2. Other more minor inconsistencies which are still apparent possibly come, as I mentioned before, from the use of numbers and percentages when describing qualitative grounded themes. As reviewer Luyben, similarly points out ‘sometimes the numbers seem to contradict the description of the results.’ For instance, the authors claim in the abstract and the text that almost half of the women in their sample were aware of the handover process, seems to contradict the conclusion that ‘patients are aware of a handover process and view it as a positive indicator of teamwork...’ (page 1). From the figures provided, actually the majority, 52%, had no knowledge of the handover process. Thus perhaps the conclusion on page 10, para 4 would more accurately read ‘This study illustrates that WHEN patients were aware of a handover process they viewed it as...’

Similarly, on page 5 para 3 ‘Participants appreciated handover and 1/3 commented that they believed that handovers were done to their satisfaction or better’, still sounds contradictory. Does this mean that 2/3 thought handover was below a satisfactory standard? I suspect not since if this figure represent a portion of the whole sample, and since only 47% of this sample were aware of the process in the first place, then a 1/3 could suggests that of those 14 women who reported being aware of the handover 10 of them thought this process was
positive. This figure seems to support the claims being made convincingly but because of the way the findings are presented it is very confusing to get an impression on the credibility of the claims being made.

I'm confused by the fact that on page 6 para 4, 15 participants reported knowing about birth plans being used in handovers when only 14 of the participants had knowledge about the process taking place?

In the discussion the authors claim that ‘In our study, patients expressed a wish to be consulted when management plans changed, particularly those which impacted on or were contrary to patient-authored birth plans.’ (page 9 para 1) this is despite reporting that only 3 women expressed that understanding current management was an important factor (page 7 para 5).

Finally, I'm not convinced page 3 para 3 adds anything to the paper since this is a qualitative piece of research.

This version of the paper titled ‘Patients perceptions of safety and quality of maternity clinical handover’ shows that the authors have taken on board many of the suggestions made in the previous reviews. This work has made the paper clearer however there are still inconsistencies which should be addressed as minor essential revisions before publication is considered.

**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