Reviewer’s report

Title: Perceptions and actions of healthcare professionals regarding mother-child relationship in an intermediate neonatal intensive care unit: a qualitative study

Version: 2
Date: 19 March 2014

Reviewer: Cara Bicking Kinsey

Reviewer’s report:

General Comments:

This is a generally well-written report of a qualitative research study. The exemplars included in the results section match the description of each theme and the data is presented in a logical order.

Discretionary Revisions

(which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

1) In the first paragraph under background, you write of “physical and emotional bonding”. I am not sure what physical bonding might be. As a researcher who has extensively examined the concept of maternal-infant bonding, I encourage you to be a little more clear and consistent about what you are describing. This is based on my own bias about how bonding should be presented in the literature, and is certainly not a necessary revision, just a suggestion. If you are interested, please see my published concept analysis:


Minor Essential Revisions

(such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

2) In the abstract, “a NICU” needs to be changed to “an NICU”. This should be corrected throughout the manuscript. Also in the abstract, the first sentence under results and the first sentence under conclusion appear to be missing words.

3) Under background, second paragraph second sentence appears to have extra words. Also, the objective of the study presented in the background does not match the abstract. It adds “the needs of these mothers” which I don’t think is really an objective of the study. Please consider removing that.

4) Under methods, the theoretical framework is a little difficult to understand. I suggest working with some colleagues who aren’t familiar with the theory to try to
refine your description. The last sentence in the second paragraph is also confusing. In the methods section, please include the language in which interviews were conducted and a statement about translation if necessary. Missing a word in the second to last sentence under type of study.

5) There is inconsistency in the terms used to describe the role of the HCPs (i.e. in the abstract the term “nurse” is used but in the recruitment and sampling section is says “assistant nurse”. Is there a difference? Please be consistent, including in Table 1). Table 1 should also include %, not just n.

6) In the results section, at times you refer to premature babies in a way that suggests that these are the only types of babies that are in your NICU. Please be clear about whether or not this is true. In the third paragraph of the results section, you inconsistently use the words “their” and “her” referring to the mother.

7) Please reconsider the word “mediator” in the 7th paragraph of the discussion. Is this the word used by your references here? I think of a mediator as something that is necessary for the cause and effect to occur (a step on the causal pathway) but I think a mother-child relationship could occur without the nursing team. Perhaps the nursing team is just a positive influence.

8) You have several sentences that are too long and thus difficult to understand. They are: abstract second sentence; methods first sentence; type of study second sentence; data analysis second sentence.

9) I don’t feel that Figure 1 adds to our understanding of the themes. I am not sure what it is trying to show with respect to the relationship between the four items?

Major Compulsory Revisions
(which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

10) There are no limitations reported in this study.

11) I am not an expert in qualitative research, but do have some experience and I feel that this study may lack rigor, at least in the way it is presented in the manuscript. The authors do not describe or reference the phenomenological research method in any detail, and as it is, I am wondering if they have used phenomenology or if they have really completed a thematic analysis. I also am a little confused as to why there are themes and then “categories of analysis”. I have never heard of the latter before, and usually researchers present the themes as the results. The authors also should report more about the ways in which they assured trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity. Simply stating that thematic content was cross-checked by a second researcher does not invoke confidence in the analysis. I believe the methods section needs to address the rigor of the study more clearly and with more detail.

12) As a NICU nurse myself, I was a little disappointed with the discussion section. I felt that most of the knowledge gleaned from this study was common
sense or already known and the authors didn’t offer much explanation of what
this research adds to our current knowledge. I think they should expand the
discussion of the impact that this research might have. In the last sentence they
mention “implementing measures”; what might these be?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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 that I have no competing interests