Author's response to reviews

**Title:** Factors affecting staff morale on inpatient mental health wards in England: a qualitative investigation

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**Version:** 2 **Date:** 28 February 2011

**Author's response to reviews:** see over
Dear Editor,

Revision of MS: 2010564097492772 - Factors affecting staff morale on inpatient mental health wards: a qualitative investigation

The reviewers’ comments were helpful and have been fully taken into account in revising our paper. We think this has resulted in a significantly improved draft. Changes are detailed below, and changes made are also shown with track changes on the attached. Almost all the amendments relate to the comments of Reviewer 1, as Reviewer 2 for the most part confined himself to enthusiastic comments.

Reviewer 1

Our responses to comments are in bold

Comment: This study represents a component of a larger national study, and as such the paper, in some areas, tends to be lacking in specific details with a misplaced focus on aspects of the major study. For example the authors throughout the study refer to a quantitative element of the larger study, however no there is no reference source or details available to the reader. Therefore the authors should make greater efforts to focus the paper as a standalone piece. (Major Compulsory Revision)

Our response: We have now supplied substantial further details in both the introduction and methods sections of the links between this qualitative study and the quantitative study, allowing the reader to understand more readily what has been done in the quantitative study and how the qualitative study fits with this. Two references to the findings of the quantitative study have been inserted. We have also amplified several aspects of the qualitative study methods, including ward selection, participant characteristics and data collection methods: further details are below. Thus the paper can now more readily be read without needing to refer elsewhere to obtain details of the quantitative study on which it builds and with full methodological details provided.

Comment: The authors (p4) states that the aim of the study is to address the significant gap in the literature, surely the aim should be more focused on mental health practice and service enhancement. (Major compulsory revision)

Our response: This point is well made. We have refocused the statement of study aims onto extending understandings of mental health practice and enhancing service delivery. This statement is now a more valid reflection of the work.

Comment: The methods are appropriate, however further clarity is required in terms of respondents/inclusion criteria. The authors state (p4) that they included senior clinical, nursing, allied health professional. The classification ‘senior clinical staff’ must be clarified. The results are very specific in terms of attributing comments to specific mental health staff for example medical consultant staff, who are not identified in the staff inclusion section. Authors should attempt a greater reconciliation between those included in the study and the respondents identified in results section of the paper. (Major compulsory revision)

Our response: We have provided significantly more detail regarding the characteristics of the participants. In the Sample section there is substantial detail regarding selection of participants, and the Results section is now supported by two new tables, Table 1 and Table 2, providing details of participant characteristics.
Comment: I am not clear about the relevance of the point (p4) referring to the repeat administration of a questionnaire. (Minor essential revision)
Our response: This is not a particularly important point and rather than explain it in detail, we have deleted it.

Common: Beyond purposively selecting the 7 wards to get the top four and bottom three, what process was used? Was there a stratification process? (Minor essential revision)
Our response: We have now added under the ‘Setting’ section in the methods a full account of how the wards were selected from the sample in the national survey.

Comment: How many respondents were included in the focus group and is there any demographic data on respondents? (Minor essential revision)
Our response: See above – we have added a clearer account regarding sample selection to the Sample section of the methods, and two tables (Tables 1 and 2) describing participant characteristics.

Comment: From what sources were the topics for the focus groups developed? (Minor essential revision)
Our response: Under Procedures in the methods section, we have added a brief description of how topic guides were developed.

Comment: What model of qualitative data analysis was used? (Minor essential revision)
Our response: The thematic analysis model used is now more clearly described in the Analysis section in the method. Two additional references have been provided to support this.

Comment: The results section is presented as many subheadings, such an approach tends towards fragmentation. There does not appear to be an order eg subheading ‘perspective of ward managers’ appear out of character to other subheadings. (Minor essential revision)
Our response: We have reconsidered the organisation of this section, which now has four new main headings (staff team, management and leadership context, organisational structures, and experiences of being with patients). Each of these has a very short introduction to the themes and material within it. We have also reviewed all titles within these sections, and feel the results section now has a much clearer structure. The ‘out of character’ heading alluded to above has been removed.

Comment: In the discussion (p13) the authors once again refer to a quantitative study, as indicated earlier this needs to be reviewed in a context of the paper.
Our response: See above – we have provided a clearer description in the introductory and methods sections of the paper of how this qualitative study fits with the quantitative national survey within which it was nested.

Comment: The limitations are identified. Perhaps the sampling process could be referred to. (Discretionary revision)
Our response: We have added a sentence to the limitations section on the fact that convenience and accessibility as well as purposive sampling principles had a part in the selection of wards.

Comments: The abstract is representative of the study. As regards the title perhaps it should reflect the fact that it is UK/English based. Some terminology may be
unclear to an international audience eg modern matron. The authors should review and be mindful of an international audience. (Minor essential revision)

**Our response:** The title and abstract have been amended to reflect that this study is based in England and the term modern matron deleted from the text and explained in the new table of participant demographics.

Reviewer 2

**Comment:** I find nearly nothing to criticize, one very minor point: P.4, 2nd par.: “Most previous…have been single case studies”: After that sentence I would expect three references, at least two. There is only one.

**Response:** We have added two further references. Two of the references now in the list are to systematic reviews, which summarise findings from many other studies.

We hope these revisions may be found satisfactory and are of course very happy to respond to any further points,

Yours sincerely

Sonia Johnson
(and colleagues)