Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 16 January 2011

Reviewer: Seamus Cowman

Reviewer’s report:

The paper is coherent and clearly structured and in the main corroborates the available knowledge on the subject area. There is a limited new and additional contribution to the scientific knowledge available; however its interdisciplinary approach is unusual as the majority of work tends to be based on a single profession. Overall the writing is acceptable. Other observations of the paper:

Is the question posed well defined.

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)

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)

Are the methods appropriate and well described.

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)

I am not clear about the relevance of the point (p4) referring to the repeat administration of a questionnaire. (Minor essential revision)

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)

Are the data sound

How many respondents were included in the focus group and is there any
demographic data on respondents? (Minor essential revision)
From what sources were the topics for the focused groups developed? (Minor essential revision)
What model of qualitative data analysis was used? (Minor essential revision)

Manuscript adherence to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.
The standards of reporting generally conform to best practice. The results section is presented as many subheadings, such an approach tended 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)

Are discussions and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by data?
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. The conclusions are well supported by the data. (Major compulsory revision)

Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
The limitations are identified. Perhaps the sampling process could be referred to. (Discretionary revision)

Title and Abstract
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)

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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'