Reviewer’s report

Title: A focus group study of enteric disease case investigation: successful techniques utilized and barriers experienced from the perspective of expert disease investigators

Version: 1 Date: 7 November 2014

Reviewer: Benjamin Gregory Polkinghorne

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Title: A focus group study of enteric disease case investigation: successful techniques utilized and barriers experienced from the perspective of expert disease investigators.

Version 1, 06/11/2014

Reviewer: Ben Polkinghorne

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper. It is clearly written and addresses an important aspect of communicable disease control. I am not aware of a previous similar study. However I feel the Results are currently too long and the Discussion too short.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The quotes provide great colour but many are far too long. The target audience (interviewers/epidemiologists) will be more interested in what was said than how it was said. E.g. the quote at P26, L557-L562 could be cut to: “When you’re speaking with someone basically paid by the hour, where they don’t get benefits, they don’t get sick time, they’re very…reluctant to stay home…” and still get the whole point across.

2. The Discussion needs more exploration of some of the pitfalls of the interview techniques mentioned. E.g. P13 mentions using a person’s surname to guess culture/ethnicity. This is a common tactic but making assumptions can backfire. Also listening in on interviews (P28, L596) has confidentiality issues etc.

3. The two recommendations made on P30 should be explicitly explored in the Discussion with comparisons to Canadian and international practice e.g. Australia has standard interview forms for many enteric diseases see: www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hneph/foodborne_diseases/resources_for_ozfoodnet_investigators

4. The thematic analysis using “both an inductive and deductive approach” requires some more explanation. I retrieved reference 22 and I believe it describes using either an inductive or deductive approach not both?

5. Figure 2 (P11) is nice but does not serve as a stand-alone element. It could be improved by either including explanatory text summarised from page 10, or by
changing to a text box summary of main points of the framework.


7. Local references need a short explanation or definition for an international audience: P7, L148 “public health inspectors” and “public health nurses” P14, L284 “411.ca”

Discretionary Revisions

8. P5, L92-L101 is a very long run-on sentence. I believe it will read better if each point became a numbered dot point. This would also help to break up the dense text. I also believe that P7, L143-146 and P9, L165-L169 would benefit from the same approach.

9. As someone who has experienced the same difficulties in interviews there are some real gems in this paper that can assist novices and experienced interviewers alike. Consider including a text box summary in the Discussion of common barriers and techniques to overcome these.

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.