Reviewer's report

Title: The web of silence: A qualitative case study of early intervention and support for healthcare workers with mental ill-health

Version: 2 Date: 3 October 2013

Reviewer: Stephanie Knaak

Reviewer's report:

This article provides a solid qualitative investigation of the various interpersonal, social and organizational forces that shape the experiences of healthcare workers with mental health issues. The findings and subsequent discussion provide valuable insights into how early intervention and support for healthcare workers living with mental health issues might better be accomplished. My comments are as follows:

Major compulsory revisions
none

Minor essential revisions

1. The methodology mentioned is one of case study. However, the specifics of the chosen case study methodology (in terms of theoretical aim, analytical emphasis, and rigor, for example) are missing. A more comprehensive discussion of methodological approach is required in order for readers to be able to sufficiently judge the quality of the study.

2. The headings for each of the major analytical themes in the Results section should be made to read more consistently with the discussion section that follows. The first heading (responses to mental health issues at work) needs greater analytical clarity. As the overarching theme it describes is that of secrecy, silence and the need to be heard, I would suggest a title that reflects this more closely. As well, if this is an overarching theme which the subsequent findings further inform (which it seems to be), this needs to be demarcated more clearly in the presentation of the results. For the third heading in this same section (reluctance to reach out or seek help), each of the major components (which might loosely be described as stigma, the professionalism discourse, and interpersonal tensions) should be separated or demarcated more clearly as major components within this theme. Each are important findings in their own right, and the subsequent discussion implies that somewhat different processes and strategies are needed for adequately combating them.

3. I would strongly recommend presenting the results in the form of a model. This would greatly enhance the clarity of understanding of how the various themes and subthemes fit together, to create the "web of silence" alluded to in the manuscript's title.
4. There is a typo in the second sentence of the abstract (background section) that should not be missed in the process of final editing.

Discretionary revisions
none

**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.