Reviewer's report

Title: ‘People pull the rug from under your feet’: barriers to successful public health programmes

Version: 1 Date: 25 November 2007

Reviewer: Michelle C Kegler

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper describes the impact of staff turnover and attrition in a tobacco control program in Scotland. Data collection involved 56 in-depth interviews with program managers and intervention team members. Staff turnover has been recognized as a significant barrier in implementing public health programs, but has never been examined as carefully as in this paper to my knowledge. Understanding how staffing challenges affect community interventions is a worthwhile undertaking.

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

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

Since this paper is essentially a single case study of one project, it would be helpful to understand the project in more detail. The following details should be added:

1. What was the duration or timeframe of the project? Was it two years, five years and when did it occur?
2. The authors mention three phases. What kinds of activities occurred in each phase and how long did they last?
3. Who funded the project? Were there subcontracts or financial arrangements with partner organizations? If so, what were the deliverables and/or responsibilities?
4. How many and what types of organizations were in the partnership and what were their responsibilities?
5. Why was the “community regeneration” partnership winding down--was it established for a different purpose?
6. Was the project focused on an area within a city, one municipality, multiple municipalities, or a region? What was the population size and demographic makeup? The only descriptor at present is “low income area.”
7. How many intervention teams were there and what did they do?

Additional suggestions are ordered by paper section:

Introduction
The introduction focuses mainly on tobacco control, with a brief mention of barriers and facilitators to community development approaches to health promotion. Since the findings focus on barriers, it would be useful to expand this discussion in the introduction (and discussion) sections.

Methods
The methods section would benefit from clarification in the following areas:
1. 56 interviews were conducted in total over three points in time. How many were conducted during each phase and how many different people were interviewed?
2. How were interviewees selected? Was sampling of some kind used?
3. Program managers and intervention members were interviewed. How many of each?
4. Data are presented from interviews with local community groups. Were these respondents not part of the intervention teams? How were they selected?
5. What was observed at the meetings and key events?
6. “Mapping of community activity” was used as a data source. What does this mean?
7. Were the interviews conducted in person? How long did they take on average?

Discussion
The discussion should include a limitations section. The authors suggest contingency plans to put in place to sustain the theory and culture of the program. This is a useful point and it would be nice to see some concrete suggestions. Also, the authors should place the findings within the context of existing literature on community coalitions and partnerships.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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.