Reviewer's report

Title: Efficacious, Effective, and Embedded Interventions: Implementation Research in Infectious Disease Control

Version: 1 Date: 20 May 2008

Reviewer: Gill Walt

Reviewer's report:

I am entirely sympathetic to the overall ‘message’ of the paper – that more attention is needed for research on implementation of disease control interventions. However the way the paper has been written is too descriptive and leaves the reader asking ‘so what’? The authors would do well to look at some of the literature on theories of implementation, and how it has been used in research. A reference to a review is given later.

The introduction takes too long to establish what the objective of the paper is – which only is established on page 4: ie to highlight the fundamental differences between the research paradigms associated with developing interventions for disease control and those for enhancing the uptake of those interventions – ie implementation.

The rationale for the paper is thus somewhat lost, and the case for a greater focus on implementation research is not made persuasively, which is a pity. There is nothing wrong with the idea behind the paper, but the way it is presented obscures the message. For example, there are several pages listing the different disciplines which might inform implementation research, but it is a highly descriptive list. How these disciplines might be utilized, what sorts of problems they might illuminate, what theories or approaches in each particular discipline might be helpful under what circumstances, are not issues that are addressed. It is not sufficient to simply list the different multidisciplinary approaches that might be helpful in addressing the challenges in disease control – it doesn’t help researchers concerned with the gap between say, vaccine discovery and delivery and uptake. The examples given at the end of the paper do not highlight ‘some key strategies and progress in this area’ as claimed on page 4. Also they provide three rather superficial examples of where implementation research has been used. The paper would be more interesting if these were all more actively described and analysed.

Particular comments

Page 3: Research is part of what strategy…?

Page 3: Does reference 7 really provide evidence that success in drugs and vaccine development is ‘slow’ and failure expensive?

Page 4: … conditions persist for many reasons, not just a failure in uptake …. Eg
drugs do not arrive at health clinics. There are a number of such assertions which are not supported with references. There are many reasons for failures in implementation – not all due to ‘lack of community uptake’ – some due to poor delivery systems, or attitudes and behaviour of health workers among many others. It would be good to differentiate more clearly in the paper.

Page 4 - 6: this section (Product development, efficacy and effectiveness: Analyses in isolation) is overlong – and somewhat dense. The main point could be made much more succinctly. And the next section – pp 6 – 8 on embedding interventions which claims to be analyses in context could also be said much more clearly. It would also gain from a definition of what the authors mean by ‘embedded’, with some examples.

Page 8: the section that defines ‘implementation research’ provides a number of different definitions of implementation research, and then one from the authors, which is too long to be helpful. There are many approaches to implementation research – which usually is multidisciplinary – to which the authors do not refer. For a review see Saetren, H. 2005. Facts and Myths about Research on Public Policy Implementation: Out-of-Fashion, Allegedly Dead, But Still Very Much Alive and Relevant. Policy Studies Journal 33(4): 559-582.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.