Reviewer's report

Title: Integrated Preoperative Care Pathway - A Study of a Regional Electronic Implementation

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Reviewer: Brian Dixon

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The article chronicles the implementation of standardization across preoperative assessment (POA) of patients and an electronic form to support POA for elective surgery in one region within the UK. The study draws upon 6 face-to-face interviews plus a focus group and notes from two workshops to infer lessons using a case study approach informed by Normalization Process Theory (NPT). Over several years, the region was able to successfully comply with guidelines to increase outpatient surgery rates and use of the electronic POA forms to screen patients for outpatient surgery eligibility. This success was enabled by a number of important socio-technical factors outlined in the study.

While the project leaders are to be commended for a successful implementation, there are a number of major and minor changes needed to prepare the article for publication. The suggestions are detailed below:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Methods: The article does not describe how the key stakeholders interviewed were selected and recruited. Given that the results of the study are so positive, it makes the reader wonder whether the POA nurses were cherry-picked for participation given they were routine users of the eForm. Did the researchers take any steps to ensure balanced participation or responses? A clearer description for why these stakeholders and workshops were targeted would strengthen the methodology.

2. Methods: The article in general refers to ‘we’ yet there is only one author indicated and referred to in the text. Does the work represent independent research by a single qualitative researcher, or was it performed by a team? The methods do not describe how audio recordings or transcripts were coded for analysis. There is reference to NPT, but were the categorizations done by multiple individuals or just a single researcher? If the latter, it would be good to understand his role in the development and implementation of the eForm system. Qualitative researchers need to be upfront about their personal biases when reporting their findings.

3. Discussion: The article describes how this work fits into the broader knowledge base for standardizing POA processes and data collection. Yet there is no explanation for how this work fits into the broader knowledge base for understanding complex socio-technical factors in the development and
implementation of health information technologies. This is not self-evident in the article itself as the factors described as the key lessons are extremely similar to those described in previous socio-technical articles. Is this article simply the application of NPT to a health ICT case study, or does it hold more for socio-technical approaches in health care?

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The abstract promises “clear” synergies between the policy and technical implementation of the eForms. Yet the Discussion section does not make these synergies clear. The reader must re-read the article a couple times before making all of the connections in the Results section. A more streamlined and cogent synthesis in the Discussion section should help tie together the loose ends making the realization more clear for the reader.

Discretionary Revisions

1. The article is very long, even for qualitative research. Consider whether all of the included quotes are truly necessary for illustrating concepts described in the Results section.

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