Reviewer's report

Title: Factors influencing nurses' compliance with Standard Precautions in order to avoid occupational exposure to microorganisms: A focus group study.

Version: 2 Date: 30 November 2010

Reviewer: Mary-Louise McLaws

Reviewer's report:

Previous Points
2. The request to have other theoretically based studies of aspects of Standard Precautions (SP) to be including in your literature review is for scientific reporting rigour. It is imperative that, while journals provide little space to include a full literature review, authors not mislead by omission. Your new statement now correctly informs your readers who may be new to the field that there have been attempts at using theories as frameworks and then why the current authors have chosen their framework.

5. Even senior staff unknown to junior staff may appear or act older. A brief sentence would be helpful about the facilitator’s observation that there was no overt impact of a senior nurse attending the group on the more junior nurses.

7. Yes you have included in the Methods section the steps you took to ensure trustworthiness of the data, I was also wanting to know if it happened how often a factor did not fit?

8. I accept that it may not have come up during discussion but dispute with the authors their stance that ‘push’ an issue is inappropriate. It is acceptable for a discussion group facilitator to ‘explore’ deeper issues either when the participants divulge the issue until the discussion moves away from the area of interest or until the discussion about the issue has exhausted itself. It is also acceptable to be provocative, but not insulting or disrespectful, but suggest an idea for them to explore its validity.

9. I believe the authors have missed my point about clustering results under low, medium and high risk. Yes, healthcare workers should not compare an activity to another for risk, but rather abide by the Standard Precaution rules. However, we know healthcare workers do not comply with parts of the SP policy or with certain patient contacts. I do not support the conclusion that healthcare workers contradict themselves, rather they view each activity and patient in terms of their own risk. The work by Curtis and Biran (2001) is an exception piece into hygiene behaviour by the community and they hypothesize about the evolution of our protective behaviour against risk of infection. Curtis has undertaken many studies since to explore hygiene behaviour. MacQueen (1995) undertook an ethnographic study of healthcare workers to explore nursing staff perception about dirtiness of patients which varied according to activity and patient. Healthcare workers were members of the community long before they became
healthcare workers, and yes you are correct in that they must abide by policies. However, they are not complying. Could it also be in part due to their evolution of self protection? The, low-medium-high levels are derived from the Fulkerson Risk Scale to test hand hygiene compliance. There have been numerous papers successfully reporting the differences in compliance with hand hygiene in the “high” risk end of the Fulkerson scale compared with the lower end of the scale. I proposed that you would report behaviour by these levels to help explain the healthcare workers’ subconscious hierarchy (or perceptions) about their complying with SP for the different activities or type of patient (adult, child) that might clarify when/why they behave a certain way.

11. Scholarly pieces are for not just an exchange of information (i.e. methods and results) between the authors and their peers, it is a discussion that should add to the body of knowledge and let the readers understand just how it does add to it. Just because a study is qualitative does not preclude you from discussing the universal similarities or differences of quantitative studies of SP or studies reporting on only a component of SP.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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'