Reviewer's report

Title: Fatherhood and children with complex healthcare needs: qualitative study of fathering, caring and parenting

Version: 1 Date: 15 September 2010

Reviewer: Toity Deave

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written paper and explores an important but complex topic that often gets overlooked and I appreciate the emphasis, at the end, on identifying the positive characteristics and building on those to help other fathers.

The ‘findings’ element of the abstract is rather stilted and, in parts, requires clarification. For example, “….father-focused services such as provision would induce guilt feelings.”

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The question posed by the authors is succinct and clear.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods used are appropriate and they have, generally, been well described. However, please see my first two points below.

3. Are the data sound?
The data appear to be sound and the quotes are taken from the range of fathers

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The manuscript appears to adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The discussion and conclusions are well balanced but there are a few additional points (as made in points 3-5 below) that would produce a more persuasive discussion.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
There are no limitations or weaknesses of the study stated.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
The authors make no mention of any work that they are undertaking or have undertaken prior to this piece of work.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title is accurate. The abstract, as mentioned above, lacks some clarity in the
findings.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

The writing is of a good standard, the paper is well written.

There are a few aspects of this study that I would like further information about or want to question:

1. Re data collection: there is no reference as to where the information and/or knowledge came from to derive the broad topic guide for the interviews (Discretionary Revision);

2. It would be helpful to have some indication of the number of families/fathers that the CNN team have contact with at any one time and did they address the letters specifically to the father in the family? (Discretionary Revision – but this is an important aspect that you highlight in the discussion but not in the methods.)

3. There is no discussion about the wide age range of children in the sample and whether this is likely to have an effect on the views of the fathers (Discretionary Revision);

4. Is it important that the researcher was female not male? Might this have been important in eliciting information and detail from the fathers? Might a male researcher have gained different types of information in any way (Discretionary Revision but this is an interesting aspect to discuss and is relevant to anyone wanting to engage with fathers for the purposes of further research and/or practice)?

5. It might be helpful to make some reference to professionals’ ability and/or need for training in order to relate and engage with fathers (Discretionary Revision but this is an important aspect in relation to policy and an interesting one to discuss and is relevant to anyone wanting to engage with fathers for the purposes of further research and/or practice)?

I would like to recommend that this paper is accepted subject to discretionary revisions.

This is an article of importance in its field.

I have no competing interests.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests.