Reviewer’s report

Title: Geriatric Day Hospital: opportunity or threat? A qualitative exploratory study of the referral behaviour of Belgian general practitioners.

Version: 1 Date: 25 March 2010

Reviewer: Markus Themessl-Huber

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions

Background section:
The background section’s structure is somewhat confusing. It is difficult to identify the focus of the manuscript. The topics vacillate between general and specific information rather than moving from the general to the specific (i.e. introduction of the CCM-aspects of the GDH-GP related issues; Belgian healthcare – GP related issues – GDH).
As a result, the main focus on GPs in the research question comes as a surprise as most of the information is about the rationale for and structure of the GDH.
Re-structuring the background section and providing more information about issues surrounding GP involvement/engagement would help to clarify and strengthen the manuscript’s focus.

Methods

Design
More information is needed on the research design. Even in an exploratory project, what was the rationale for choosing FGD over interviews? A moderator and observer are mentioned as part of the FGDs, who were they (GPs, researchers, etc.)? Why were GPs observed (how did that help to answer the research question)? What criteria were used for populating the observation form?
What qualitative data analysis framework was used (what kind of thematic analysis)? How were the codes defined (a priori and/or in the course of the analysis)?
At what stage in the FGD was the local information on GDHs introduced to GPs?

Procedure
Please outline the rationale of using a random selection of GPs when you then combined it with snowballing? Why did you not use purposive sampling?
Potential biases of the different selection criteria for Dutch and French speaking groups were not made explicit (different cultural contexts, mixed groups of GDH use in the Dutch groups vs. separate user and non-user groups in the French groups.
How did the researchers know that data saturation had been reached?
What information was given to GPs about the research project? At the beginning of the results section you mentioned that the discussions got stuck at the beginning because GPs did not know about GDHs.

Was any ethics clearing required? If so, was it granted? If not, can you make explicit that no ethics clearance was required?

Participants
106 GPs took part but what was the size of the GP pool?

Results
The titles of the subsections are not always self-explanatory. Introductory remarks outlining the type of findings in the respective sections as well as summarising paragraphs would help the reader to better understand the findings.
I would have preferred the use of direct quotations in the text rather than in tables. Tables could be used to summarise sections.
Information is missing on why some GPs were familiar with GDHs. What does ‘by chance’ mean?
Generally, it would be helpful to know whether certain points were raised by a single or by various GPs.
Likewise, it would be helpful for the reader to know what statements are based on GPs actual experiences and which are based on assumptions of newly informed GPs.
Also, it would be good to have an indication about the level of agreement within FGDs on the issues mentioned (i.e. how many are ‘some’ GPs, line 103).
Do you have information about GP knowledge on other services for older people? Does this differ from their knowledge of GDHs?

Lines 96ff: Was this information provided by the researchers during the FGDs or is this information based on GPs who had been informed about GDHs prior to the study? This would be an important difference (i.e. it would be about actual experience vs. assumptions).

Discussion
The discussion reads more like a summary of results than an analysis and synthesis of results. Also, additional results are presented, which had not been mentioned in the results section. Very few links are obvious with information provided in the background section.
The implication for practice section provides more analysis and synthesis. More of this would be needed in the discussion section. However, even in the implications section new information is introduced.

Minor Essential Revisions

Methods

Design
The total number of participants should be listed here.
On line, 59, text is missing before and/or after ‘Verbatim’

Standards of reporting
Please revisit the reference section, some tidying up is needed.

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:
Declare that I have no competing interests