Reviewer’s report

Title: International benchmarking of specialty hospitals. A series of case studies on comprehensive cancer centres.

Version: 3 Date: 21 April 2010

Reviewer: Klaske Wynia

Reviewer’s report:

In general, this paper improved compared to my first review, but still needs major revisions before it is possible to decide on acceptance or rejection. Therefore I will give suggestions for improvements.

In general: I would suggest the author to look for more support on writing a research paper before submitting this paper again.

Abstract

1 The Methods section is incomplete and should contain information on the design of the study, methods for data collection and measurements.
2 The Results section presents information concerning methodology aspects.

Background

1 Has much improved.
2 I still miss a motivation for the growing interest in international benchmarking since 2000 as a consequence of the WHO report ‘Health systems: Improving Performance’.
3 On page 4 Second paragraph starting with ‘Searching Pubmed ….’ is not relevant in this context. Text until The importance of indicator development in health care’ can be left out.
4 Also Table 1 is not relevant and can be left out.
5 The ‘Research relevance’ section (page 5) should be more comprehensive.
6 On page 5 the objectives of this paper are presented and on page 6 the research questions are presented. This is double, and one (page 5) should be left out.
7 The ‘International benchmarking …’ (on page 5) is not relevant and should be left out or findings should be integrated in the text.

Methods section

1 The author explained why ‘case studies’ were used but did not explain what was meant with a case in this study. As a consequence, the sentence ‘The number of cases per case study’ is confusing.
2 Page 7: Paragraph label ‘Case study research methodology’. I would suggest ‘Case study research protocol’ as more appropriate in relation to the context of the paragraph.
3 In the final line of this paragraph the author reports about ‘an important distinction …’. What are the consequences of this distinction?

4 On page 8 ‘lessons learned’ are already reported by describing the added steps compared to the case before.

Results section:

1 The author frequently reports ‘conclusions’ which is not appropriate for a results section. Obviously ‘lessons learned’ in a case study were integrated in the next case study. However, this method is not described in the method section.

2 For the ‘lessons learned’ the author should be more explicit in reporting and explaining in the proposed adjustments in the benchmark process. (response to question 2, page 10)

3 In general: results should be presented in the past tense.

4 Page 10: why are results described for case study 1 not reported in Table 4?

5 In general: the structure of the results section is confusing throughout the manuscript. Again I suggest the author to treat each case study as an independent study with different benchmark processes. By doing so the results of the three case studies can be integrated for each research question. By doing so:

The objectives for this paper should be (i) to present a process model for international benchmarking of operational performances by comprehensive cancer centres (or departments), and (ii) to give a description of success factors for international benchmarking in comprehensive cancer centres. Results can be reported for these both objectives.

Conclusions:

1 This section should also report on strengths and limitations of the study, and elaborate on the implications of the conclusions for further research and clinical practice.

2 This section should not end with a reference to a table representing results!

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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