Reviewer's report

Title: The importance of primary care as a multidimensional concept: a systematic literature review.

Version: 1 Date: 22 October 2009

Reviewer: Keith Stevenson

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   
   Not really. The title reflects the writer's opinion that primary care needs to be understood as a multidimensional concept. But the Abstract suggests the aim of the study was to identify essential dimensions of primary care systems and examine the existing evidence for their relevance...

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   
   The methods follow the usual format for a systematic review of this type...and are appropriately described.

3. Are the data sound?
   
   Not sure as in the limitations it is stated that the search was limited to English Language journals limited to 5 years 2003-2008...and limited to the abstract containing one of the terms in Starfield's definition. I know of papers that would not be selected by this method.

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

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   
   Not sure...I cannot decide if this paper really hits the mark.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   
   Eventually... Yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   
   This paper is acknowledged to be an output from a large EU study.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Not really....I would suggest that this paper is a review of research into areas of primary care and an assessment of its breadth.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
yes.

In summary this is a long paper to read and digest. The title uses the term 'importance' but importance for whom is not addressed.

I think the point that primary care is usefully understood as multidimensional because of the different levels at which it is delivered is indeed useful.

A review of the research into primary care used to provide evidence to support the notion of multidimensionality is also useful...

However the dimensions that are identified seem unending eg 8 further sub-dimensions in Governance, 6 further sub-dimensions in economic conditions, 7 in access, and so on...throughout the paper....

What are we to make of all this?
Personally I would cut the paper to a short report...and turn it round to answer the question: What does a systematic review of research in primary care tell us about the nature of the beast?

My Decision
- Accept after discretionary revisions (which the authors can choose to ignore)

Level of interest
An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of English
Satisfactory

Statistical review
Not necessary

Competing interests
none.