Reviewer's report

Title: Partnership disintegration for Primary Community-based Care Networks: a qualitative study for a national demonstration project

Version: 1 Date: 23 July 2009

Reviewer: Gawaine Powell Davies

Reviewer's report:

This article addresses an important issue: why clinicians choose to leave integrated health care services. Focusing on those who leave gives a more direct indication of really critical issues than would come from those who stay, albeit unhappily (although a combination of both groups would be even more interesting. However there seemed to be a shift between an individual focus – why specific clinicians withdrew – and an organisational focus – why partnerships disintegrated, and the design problems of the demonstration project. The data all relate to individual dissatisfaction, but the article sometimes seems to draw conclusions that go beyond this to how the system needs to be changed.

The methods used are appropriate, although they could be described more clearly and succinctly (there is some repetition between the introduction, methods and data collection sections) and the rationale for the use of qualitative methods is overly apologetic and to my mind a bit off target: qualitative methods are needed not because quantitative methods are not possible, but because the research is seeking to understand detailed individual opinions. The discussion of evaluation ‘indicators’ on P5 shifts between indicators, their use and collection. However the analysis of the data do not take full advantage of the qualitative methods. Several of the results sections (for example on individual factors: required working time and the clinic-to-hospital relationships) present too many quotations from the interviews and not enough analysis of the detail that these provide, or indication of which were the dominant and which the less common responses. The section on ‘conflicting values’ would be a good place for more analysis – there are clearly some value conflicts, but these are not drawn out. It also strikes me that there are some themes or tones that come through in quotations across the different sections that deserve more attention: a sense of dependency, of having been somehow coerced into joining, the lack of identification with the network or with the demonstration project, and the repeated use of ‘unreasonable’ – so what is their sense of ‘reasonable’ and how does it differ from the networks’ perspective.

There were also several examples of commentary being mingled with the reporting of findings – for example on P 17. These should be kept separate

I was not clear whether the major framework for the analysis – individual physician factors, partnership factors and health policy design incompatibility – came from the data (and so is a finding) or whether it was an a priori framework used to present the results.
The table with information about the clinicians interviewed is very detailed and could do with some summary: for example statistics of specialty, location and interview method. If this were well done the detailed table might be omitted.

In the discussion it is not clear how much interest is in the framework for the findings, how much in the content of the findings, and how much in the problems of the program. All three can be accommodated, but the flow could be better managed. The discussion moves quickly to solutions for the problems raised in the interviews without much consideration of whether they really are problems (or critical problems) – remember, these are the disaffected members of the network. One would want to know something of the views of those who stayed before making confident pronouncements. It is here that the ambiguity about whether this study is about individuals’ views or system flaws comes through most clearly. There would be room for some more reflection across the responses (see suggestions above), and perhaps a reflection on whether it is inevitable that there will be some dissenters, and whether helping them leave the project may not be a wise move.

The article needs some language corrections before being published. There are a number of typos, some of the language reads curiously, and the use of reported speech to give other people’s (subjects’) views is not consistent.

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

**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.