Reviewer's report

Title: The MacGyver Effect: Alive and well in health services research?

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Reviewer: Pascale Lehoux

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Review of “The MacGyver Effect: Alive and well in health services research?” MID: 1876955222539403

1. Does the debate present a novel argument, or a novel insight into existing work?
   Some parts are novel, others not (see below).

2. Does the debate address an important problem of interest to a broad biomedical audience?
   Yes (see below).

3. Is the piece well argued and referenced?
   In general, yes (see below).

4. Has the author used logical arguments and sound reasoning?
   Yes.

5. Is the piece written well enough for publication?
   Yes.

General comments

The manuscript is generally well written and raises issues that are of scholarly interest for health services and policy researchers concerned about the interface between knowledge producers and users (policymakers and the media, among others). The paper combines reflections stemming from the authors’ previous empirical research (conducted in New Zealand and which is relevant to an international audience) and current observations that are found in the literature on knowledge transfer and exchange. The manuscript, once properly revised, has the potential to stimulate debate and enlighten research practices. I suggest six areas for improvement that I define as “major” in order to ensure that the final paper achieves its stated goal and bring a more solid contribution.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The television character “MacGyver,” which is used to illustrate how researchers may overcome obstacles and challenges needs to be a bit fleshed out in the introduction. Otherwise, several readers will not connect “all of the dots” the authors rely on to make their arguments clear and which are not always consistently developed throughout the paper and its five examples;

2. On p. 2, the authors indicate that their examples “will resonate with many
researchers,” which does not appear to me as a convincing argument to read the rest of the paper. What do the authors want to achieve with those examples? What is the exact purpose of the paper? What likely contribution the authors want to make? I would have liked to see a more compelling argument than a simple invitation to partake in the authors’ reflection;

3. The authors should clarify how they came up with “three main drivers” and why these are the most relevant to address given the objectives of the paper. As mentioned above, some of the claims being made in that section (i.e., the “two-worlds” thesis, time constraints) are not new and the authors do not quote the relevant knowledge transfer and exchange literature that has already effectively summarized these issues. Moreover, the idea that scientific rigor is “threatened” by the policymaking world is rather a weak argument; I do not think that researchers ever “needed” policymakers to produce research of low quality, an observation that producers of systematic reviews often confirm. Less ironically, I suggest the authors make efforts to disentangle among their various arguments those that are really supportive of their key lessons and those that may be closer to taken for granted assumptions;

4. The perspective from which the authors discuss the tensions and challenges could be clearer (i.e., Whose agenda? That of researchers or of policymakers? Lack of “clarity” or “dissatisfaction” according to whom?) That point refers to the whole section entitled “Discussion”;

5. The way the examples are introduced in the text and summarized in “Figures” requires important revisions. Perhaps a brief summary in the text could first explain where they come from, what they are about and why they may be used to illustrate the “three drivers” (an articulation that is not clear). Then, it could be more effective if the key features of each example were displayed in a more systematic way, using, for instance, a comparative table or a series of bullets points that would provide an overview of what was at stake from a research and policy perspective (i.e., topic, commissioner, policy questions, timeframe, public controversy, resolution, etc.);

6. The section entitled “Innovation to maintain relevance” needs elaboration because it should contain clear statements about how researchers can and/or do innovate and overcome obstacles (it is currently less than a page, while more than five pages address the challenges). Otherwise, one of the authors’ key points suggesting that the “MacGyver effect” is “the solution” is not sufficiently backed up.

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:
I declare that I have no competing interests