Reviewer's report

Title: Paucity of qualitative research in general medical and health services and policy research journals: Analysis of publication rates

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Reviewer: Jonathan DeShazo

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting topic and is within the scope of the journal. I commend the authors for taking on such a difficult task. There wasn't enough detail in the methods and results to give a thorough review of the quality. In general, my comments are in two broad themes: 1) the need to present much more detail and rigor in the methodology and results, and 2) the research questions currently posed are fairly shallow and the relevance is not highlighted. Consider other relevant questions that you could add to these simple counts to balance out the merit and interest to readers.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Firstly, In terms of the research questions and scope, the contribution of this paper is somewhat limited. Wiener et. al recently published a strikingly similar 10 year review in Health Services Research and Review. " Use of Qualitative Methods in Published Health Services and Management Research: A 10-Year Review" by Weiner et al. http://mcr.sagepub.com/content/68/1/3 . To enhance the contribution of the current research, the authors of this paper could focus on a different aspect, for example, the general medicine publication venue (which is not covered in the aforementioned article) or a much broader swath of articles. Or, you could compare/contrast the differences of your 10-year review with theirs.

2. In general the methods section needs much more detail. For example, more detail is needed on the inter-rater reliability methods and the actual agreement numbers. Similarly, the validation checks between the medline search and the manual scan are briefly described but the validation statistics were not given. These are very important.

3. The need for more detail is pervasive throughout the methods. How many articles were found in your Medline search? How many were excluded, etc.?

4. In other places in your paper you mention looking for trends over time, however you make no mention of this analysis in your methods. What statistical test did you use to look for trends? Which trends did you look for (a change in the %, raw # change, etc.)

5. There is a lot of room for improvement in discussion section. The last paragraph of the discussion is the most germane to your findings, yet there is much left untouched. When possible, instead of "some might suggest", offer a citation.
6. The core of this argument in the last paragraph of the discussion is that there may be more qualitative research than is published in these journals. However, you only discuss a couple of possibilities why this might be the case. How do you know that qualitative research isn't an equal fraction of the submissions? Also, why not look into publication policies?

7. Under "Sampling" (page4) it is not clear exactly how you identified the top ten for each category. By "cumulative", did you add two-year and five year impact factor together, with Eigenfactor, etc.? Please elaborate on your methodology here.

Minor essential revisions

1. "Qualitative empirical articles" in table 4. Many readers of this article will view the term " Qualitative empirical" as an oxymoron and I think it confuses the distinction that the authors use in their methods. Consider just calling the "qualitative articles".

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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