Reviewers report

Title: Effect of an institutional development plan for user participation on personnel’s knowledge, practice, and attitudes. A controlled study.

Version: 1 Date: 30 May 2011

Reviewer: Marianne Storm

Reviewer’s report:

Title:
‘Effect of an institutional development plan for user participation on personnel’s knowledge, practice and attitudes. A controlled study.’

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Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript addressing the issue of user participation in mental health services and how an institutional development plan can impact on health care providers’ attitudes, knowledge and practices. The paper is interesting on an important topic, however before a decision on acceptance or rejection the authors will have to respond to the issues listed below.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Study background needs to pay more attention to clarification of the core components of user participation, what the objective with user participation is in mental health hospitals/organizations and how this relates to the current study. I recommend a more updated literature review including recent articles on implementation of service user involvement in mental health services. In addition the authors should reproduce more of the studies referred to as relevant to the current study. For example: what are the benefits of user participation and what are the potential barriers to implementation in mental health care. The authors also need to clarify key concepts in the study aim such as: ‘a controlled study’, ‘development plan’ and ‘personnel’.

The methods section needs reorganization, and more information. The description of the study design is presented several places (in the first paragraph, as part of participants and data collection). I think this information needs to be presented under a heading ‘Study design’. Is this an ‘intervention study’, a
'controlled study' or both? As I find this confusing, the authors need to be clear on this.

Three mental health hospitals were included in the study. Why were these included? Where there any inclusion criteria and could these be reported? And what are potential biases with the study sample? Could the authors also explain who the user representatives in the project group and implementation group are? Are they representing mental health service user organizations? Did the participants in the project group and implementation group take part in the two surveys? What impact might this have had on the study results?

The authors write under the sub-heading ‘Participants’: “The group of employees answering the questionnaire was thus not the same in the first and the second time of measurement.” When those responding to the two surveys are not necessarily the same people, the authors needs to address this issue and its potential consequences for study results in study limitations.

In the results section the authors do not comment on the baseline results, but solely focus on the changes in scores from baseline to follow-up. Few quantitative studies have been conducted on implementation of user participation. Therefore some comments on the baseline results would be useful.

There is also information missing in the result section. When referring to the direction of change from base-line to follow-up for the area: Knowledge about user participation it was found an increase in knowledge for nine out of then questions (page 10). What questions? Table 4 only includes five questions for knowledge. Please be clear on this also for the areas: Practice of user participation and Attitudes towards user participation. In the last paragraph in the results section, I miss information in the text about how many people reported that the unit’s attitude towards user participation is good or very good. This information is not presented in table 5.

In general the discussion needs to be rewritten to focus on viewing the study results in relation to previous research using the CPQ and literature on implementation of user involvement in mental health services. The last sentence under the heading “Personnel’s views about user participation are generally evolving” is unclear. What are the general changes in society? This needs more elaboration.

A discussion of study limitations must be expanded and preferably be placed towards the end of the discussion. What are potential weaknesses with the study design and methods? Only service providers were approached in the surveys. This issue needs to be addressed when studying user participation in mental health services. It is commented that there are some concerns with the outcome measure CPQ. I believe that the authors need to be more specific about these and what the consequences are for the current study. Richter et al. (2009) has commented that the CPQ should be critically evaluated because of high interrelatedness among the items from the various topics. They also question if the items in the CPQ are valid indicators of the construct consumer involvement
The conclusion needs to be rewritten and include a paragraph on potential implications of this study to clinical practice in mental health services, and the relevance of the study results to future research in this area.

This is not a randomized controlled study. Therefore, I recommend the authors to use the term comparison group instead of control group throughout the article. I also believe that the word ‘effect’ used in the title and in general in the article is too strong, and suggest using the word ‘impact’.

Discretionary revision

Could the authors consider a subheading ‘Ethics’ in the methods section, including how study participants were ensured anonymity and the sentence about the approval of the study by the regional ethical committee for health and medical research. Was the study approved by the Privacy Ombudsman at the Norwegian Social Science Data Service?

The questionnaire was filled out twice. Why were there mailed four rounds of invitations (page 6). Why was administrative staff included in the study sample?

The authors write that there was some lack of consensus in the translation of the CPQ. Could these be reported? The paragraph describing the response categories for the items in the CPQ (page 7) is hard to follow. Could this information be presented in relation to table 3?

Could the information about the total study sample (page 8) be presented in table 2?

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.