Reviewer's report

Title: Effects of leadership and staffing on quality of care in nursing homes

Version: 1 Date: 16 June 2011

Reviewer: Danielle Doherty

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Minor essential revisions

Study variables, paragraph 3-
'The two leadership styles were each measured by five items on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 1 anchored at strongly disagree and 7 anchored at strongly agree (see 14 Appendix).’ I could not find this appendix and feel it is crucial to include.

Study variables, paragraph 4-
'The ratio of registered nurses was measured by dividing the number of full time equivalents of registered nurses (FTE) in permanent positions in the ward by the total number of full time equivalents of care staff. Only registered nurses directly involved with patient care were included.’ I am not sure what this statement means. Is it the total number of full time registered nurses divided by all full time staff (registered nurses and unlicensed workers)? What about unfilled posts? If so, surely a nursing home with many unfilled posts but an equal number of registered and unlicensed staff will have the same ratio of registered nurses as a nursing home with no unfilled posts and an equal number of registered nurses and unlicensed staff? I think this should be clarified.

Discretionary revisions

Background
The background in the paper is extremely thorough and well researched but I feel that it may be improved upon if it were slightly more concise. The leadership section feels slightly too long and it may add more impact to your findings if you focus on the studies that are related to task-orientated and relationship-orientated leadership styles specifically rather than several studies on the topic all in the same level of detail.

Results
Do you have any graphical representation of your findings? I think it would help to break up the text and hold attention.

Discussion, paragraph 11 –
‘Physical care level showed a significant negative effect on all the three quality indexes.’ For clarity I would suggest that you add that ‘An increased physical
care level showed a significant negative effect on all the three quality indexes’.

Conclusion

‘Furthermore, the study shows that nursing homes should minimize the use of unlicensed staff. High ratios of unlicensed staff are, however, often correlated with factors that are unfortunate for quality of care, like low staff stability. Hence, the focus should be on unlicensed staff and its related factors, like staff stability.’ Would it be more appropriate to say that nursing homes should aim to minimize the use of unlicensed staff where possible by addressing the underlying reasons for the use of such staff such as low staff stability? The statement seems slightly oversimplified if not.

Minor issues not for publication, spelling and grammar -

Abstract, conclusion
‘clarifying of staff’s roles’ – change to ‘clarification of staff roles’.

Abstract, conclusion-
I would suggest adding the word ‘address’ before ‘factors related to high ratios of unlicensed staff, like low staff stability’.

Background, paragraph 1-
‘Missing ‘as’ before ‘a key issue for quality of care in nursing homes.’

Background. Staffing, paragraph 2
‘For example, Rantz et al. [4] investigated 92 nursing homes in Missouri and did not find any effect for neither staffing levels nor staff mix.’ Grammatical error, double negative, needs to be changed to 'either' and 'or'.

Discussion, paragraph 9 -
‘The insignificant relationship (p = 0.09) may be explained by the assumption that licensed staff assessed the quality of care differently from unlicensed staff, the latter group presumably being less critical of their own work than unlicensed staff.’ I think it should be that the latter group (the second group mentioned, eg, the unlicensed staff) were less critical of their own work than the licensed staff.

Discussion, paragraph 10 –
'We should, however, be hesitant to conclude that unlicensed staff has a direct negative effect on quality of care.' Change to ‘have’.

Discussion, paragraph 10 –
'High ratios of unlicensed staff tend to be correlated with other factors that are unfavourable for quality of care, like e. g. low staff stability' – suggest change to ‘such as’.

Discussion, paragraph 11 –
‘Physical care level showed a significant negative effect on all the three quality indexes.’ To improve the grammar of the sentence either remove the word ‘the’ or add the word ‘of’ before ‘the three quality indexes.’

**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:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests’