Reviewer's report

Title: Building effective service linkages in primary mental health care: a narrative systematic review part 2

Version: 2 Date: 28 September 2010

Reviewer: Rachel Jenkins

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Minor essential revisions

I think the research question could do with more contextual exploration.

First of all, there needs to be discussion of why the authors are focussing on linkages as methods of strengthening PHMC, rather than on other methods. Secondly, why are guidelines per se regarded as a linkage mechanism except in so far as they may contain criteria for referral. Thirdly, any linkages between primary and secondary care will depend on logistical issues of how much primary care and secondary care is available, and how much financial resource is available to fund things like guidelines.

Human resource for health is much higher in rich countries than low and middle income countries. This paper seems to be pretty much focussed on rich countries (although it doesn’t say so) but even in rich countries there is wide variation between cities and rural areas where specialist services can be very sparse eg in large areas of Australia, and some parts of the US and Canada. Therefore it is important to know, in interpreting the results of these reviews, what human resource scenarios were operative. Also prisons were not mentioned but they are a key setting for mental health primary care and specialist work, and there have been a number of studies of prison mental health care, so I am not sure how they came to be left out of the review-this is also a limitation of the study.

The lack of studies found on severe mental illness is odd since there are many that have focussed on this client group, and it may be that in the UK at least, their care has been seen as primarily specialist driven, with primary care playing a smaller role, and so papers are written generally from a specialist vantage point rather than a primary care vantage point—this is also a limitation of the study which should be mentioned.

The methods are well described, but I think it is of interest to the reader to know the search terms used.

The data are sound. The manuscript adheres to the relevant standards. The discussion and conclusion are well balanced and supported by the data.

The title and abstract are fine and the writing is acceptable.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests:

No competing interests.