Reviewer's report

Title: Handover Patterns: An Observational Study of Critical Care Physicians

Version: 3  Date: 15 June 2011

Reviewer: Robert L Wears

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions:

1. Change the key messages to match the conclusions. What your paper shows, under the assumption of the wisdom of everyday practice, is that these widely promoted schemes do not fit clinical work very well. Why not just say that directly?

Minor essential revisions:

1. Recommend rephrasing the comment that (in the Abstract, and also in the Key Messages) that there was no clear structure, because it's likely to be quoted out of context in a misleading way. You say pretty clearly on pg 15 that there may be a much more sophisticated structure to the handoffs. I would try to make it clear that the no clear structure phrase means that they did not use any of the predefined structuring schemes, but not that there was no structure at all.

2. Pg 4, para 1. suggest removing the remark about suitability, which is very much arguable, as your data show. Simply say that they have been widely promoted.

3. Pg 5 para 4. It might be useful here to emphasize that SBAR was developed for quite a different purpose -- communication up the authority gradient about a new problem -- and why it should have been presumed to be useful for the handoff, which is a very different sort of situation, is curious.

4. Pg 12, para 2. I've often heard that SBAR was used in the Navy, but have been unable to ever find any confirmation in print for that. I wonder if it's not an urban myth? Since the IHI document referenced doesn't substantiate the statement, it might be better to drop it.

5. Pg 13, para 1. You probably intend "Talk does NOT come with question marks" here.

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