Reviewer's report

Title: How do small rural primary health care services sustain themselves in a constantly changing health system environment?

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Reviewer: Joachim Sturmberg

Reviewer's report:

This paper addresses important issues for the sustainability of primary community care in rural Australia. The author’s state that they present a system approach to the problem.

The paper unfortunately does not match the expectations of this reader.

[a] the paper does not delineate the structure and function of the local system
[b] the paper brushes over the vast number of potential problems encountered - for that matter they appear to be applicable to locations in the country
[c] what are the strategies used to make this a success, how can others learn from this? The paper does not allude to how this community approached the challenges
[d] what specific aspects have been learnt, how does the ongoing evaluation specifically influence adaptation to changing environments - federal, state, local
[e] what have been the mistakes, how could they have been avoided?

The table is not particularly helpful delineating these issues, much of it is potentially hypothetical, and there is nothing that informs me of interconnections between various aspects - this point is particularly important for a system's based analysis.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'