Reviewer’s report

Title: Patient neglect in healthcare institutions: A systematic review and conceptual model

Version: 1 Date: 28 August 2012

Reviewer: Nick Sevdalis

Reviewer's report:

The authors report a systematic review and conceptual synthesis of the topic of patient neglect in healthcare organisations. A standard evidence table is provided summarising the evidence base, as well as a conceptual model, some novel constructs for patient safety and health services research (caring vs outcome neglect, proximal vs distal causes of neglect), and a theoretical account of the evidence (qualitative model).

The paper is of great interest – and indeed extremely timely, given the ongoing discussion in the UK of the Mid Staffordshire events and enquiry. I would like to commend the authors not only on the clarity and relevance of their work but also on what is probably a brave choice: patient neglect is likely the ‘elephant in the room’ of patient safety and quality improvement science and practice. The topic is vexed and can become ‘toxic’ as per the authors’ own suggestion – this is not something that can be taken on lightly. The review, in my view, makes a very significant contribution to the literature, is well within scope of the Journal and will attract significant citations.

My key comment about the paper is that the review could be made more accessible to the readers if the structure of the paper followed more closely the structure of a systematic review. I do understand of course that the authors had to introduce some conceptual clarification alongside extracting evidence from the papers they retrieved. However, I do think that with some rather slight rearrangement the paper will become more familiar to the eye and hence more digestible to clinical and patient safety readers – as follows:

- In Methods, I think the last part of Figure 1 (data extraction) should be removed from the figure (so the figure reads more like a ‘traditional’ flowchart of a systematic review ending with no of papers included). This part should be a separate para in the Methods.

- Results should be separated from Discussion. In Results, I think the authors should have a section where they report their conceptual work (possibly after the first para of page 8). The concepts of caring/outcome neglect and also the distal/proximal causes should be introduced here – so it becomes clear to the reader that these are the authors’ own work. Then the evidence table can follow, with comments on the various findings as the authors have provided already (parts 1, 2 and 3 of Results are really the findings).
- The Discussion should then be a separate part of the paper, where the findings are commented on and where the conceptual model of figure 2 is introduced – all in all this is not very different from what is report at present. What I am suggesting is some rearrangement.

One final minor point: the past sentence of page 6 (“The overall aim...interventions”) should be removed from there – it is a Discussion statement, really, in my view.

All in all, excellent work – my key point is to separate what is conceptually novel (and hence to actually highlight the authors’ intellectual effort) from what is factually based on the reviewed papers.

**Level of interest:** An exceptional article

**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.