Reviewer's report

Title: Facilitated patient feedback can improve the quality of nursing care: an exploratory cluster randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 20 December 2012

Reviewer: Suzanne Richards

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

The research question is clear, but unfortunately the report this paper does not conform to good practice guidance on reporting (e.g. Campbell et al, CONSORT statement amended for cluster trials) and it is difficult to comment as I am unclear on the precise methodological framework.

What do you mean by a phase 2 RCT - is this an external pilot RCT? If so, there is too much emphasis on study findings (i.e. effectiveness), when such a design is best suited to answering design questions that need to be answered prior to a definitive trial (See Thabane et al, BMC Medical Research Methodology 2010, 10:1). For example, I would expect a pilot study to report estimates of key findings of effectiveness required to calculate a future sample size for a definitive trial (e.g. between group differences, standard deviations, ICCs). Although you may allude to potential findings of effectiveness, this shouldn't be the key message.

Why was a composite nursing score modelled? What questions were combined to produce the composite score (perhaps a box listing the question text?), and why was this thought to be a good idea? Composite scores for satisfaction and/or experience can hide competing evaluations; identifying changes in practice could be obscured if one area improved as a consequence of acting upon patient feedback, but another suffered as a result of the drive to improve practice. This needs to be explained in the methods, and reflected on in the discussion.

I am unclear as to exactly what was feedback to the nurses (i.e. 20 items versus a composite score) in the intervention arms as there is insufficient description in the text. The control group is also unclear; is this a 'usual care' condition for patient surveys? A little more description would be helpful.

There is no clear data analysis plan under the methods section. This must be inserted and should be consistent with the pilot study aims rather than analysis of effectiveness as is presented here. I was expecting to see a preliminary report of effectiveness (with suitable cavaets), and an estimate of the sample size required for a definitive trial.

The authors report what appear to be process evaluation data, but there is no method stated for how feedback from nurses was obtained (e.g. qualitative
interviews? survey?). The results on page 4 (Nurse's reactions to patient feedback) appear anecdotal, rather collected using some form of systematic method. Greater detail must be provided on how this information was collected.

I have not provided minor/discretionary revision. A major rewrite is needed before this paper can be reviewed in this way.

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

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests.