Reviewer's report

Title: Community participation to design remote rural primary healthcare models

Version: 1  Date: 21 December 2013

Reviewer: Jane Edwards

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

1. Is the question posed by the paper well defined?
   The paper does not set a question, but it does identify a gap in data that it seeks to fill. Let me say at the outset, the paper is an interesting addition to the field and deals with an important topic that would interest BMC readers. However, it seems to me that there are almost two papers buried in the manuscript as it currently stands. One theme is centred on the methodology and processes used in the research to encourage meaningful participation in health service planning. Another central concern is the similarities in communities' concerns, yet their very different responses to those concerns. Both of these areas are substantive fields and could be profitably amplified if there were more space to develop them. However, I will now direct the rest of my comments to the text the authors have produced, rather than the material they might choose to develop.

   The key point of the paper is the different outcomes chosen by communities. This is not really explored, particularly in relation to literature on rural communities and on community participation. The possible reasons for this difference are discussed quite cursorily. The main reason given is that communities are in differing states of readiness. This is really the question that needs examination if community participation is to be an adequate pathway to health service planning. What leads the authors to conclude that the communities were at a different state of readiness? Further, what constitutes readiness? What factors might influence readiness? Is community competency different in different communities? What factors might influence this? A discussion of such factors may also aid further development of the authors' point that different service designs may unduly burden some communities.

   I suggest that the authors read Taylor et al (2006) and consider whether what the Scottish Government wants is consumer or community participation? Do the authors think that their participants regarded themselves as engaging in community or consumer participation? The authors note that issues of dominance and hegemony may make community participation difficult. The authors describe a robust and comprehensive method for engaging with communities in identifying health needs and designing appropriate service delivery models. How then would they deal with such issues of dominance / hegemony? Likewise, how would they deal with the problem they identified about whether their participants were representative of the wider community? Taylor's
The literature review outlined a number of well documented factors that shape rural and remote service provision. It would be good to link back to this in the discussion section. For instance, how might the high levels of social capital in rural communities noted by the authors contribute to the different choices made by the study communities? On this point, a more nuanced discussion of social capital, including reference to bonding and bridging social capital, together with its dark side might help explain the different responses, the different levels of readiness and the non-participation of one community. Bonding and bridging capital might also aid a discussion about the burdens of service co-production, noted as a potential by-product of community planning of health service models. Portes (1998) is a good starting point.

No revisions required for questions 2

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

I thought the methodology was one of the really strong points of the research and of the paper. I do think this could be elaborated into a separate paper. Getting communities to identify their needs, then to identify the competencies that would best meet those needs and, finally, getting communities to design or redefine roles that matched them was a great method and deserves to be more fully discussed.

Discretionary Revisions

3. Are the data sound?

Generally speaking the data are sound. However, the way in which the individual interviews were undertaken is not explained. Did the interviews follow the content of the four workshops, for instance?

Given this project was about community participation, we heard little about the community characteristics that might have influenced participation and the different kinds of designs for which communities opted.

No revisions required for questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data
deposition?
Yes.

5. Are the discussions and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The conclusions are well supported by the data provided in the manuscript. My only reservation on this point, as indicated earlier, is the extent to which the paper embeds its discussion within the relevant scholarship.

6. Are the limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes.

8. Do the title and abstract adequately convey what has been found?
Yes, both title and abstract give a clear indication of the research findings and the content of the paper.

Minor essential revisions for question 9.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
There are several sentences that are ambiguous:

"Change results in higher proportions of younger working age people locating in accessible, commutable, rural areas, while smaller remote settlements have increasing proportions of older people".

Is the point here that younger people tend to leave remote settlements, thus increasing the proportion of older residents in these settings?

"The four communities share consistent common conditions for consulting general practice".

Should this sentence read, "The four communities share common conditions for consulting general practitioners?"

"A strong future was described as requiring young families, with consequent requirement for local jobs".

The meaning of this sentence is unclear.

References cited

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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