Author's response to reviews

Title: Hospital discharge of the elderly - an observational case study of functions, variability and performance shaping factors

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Author's response to the 2nd review

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Cover letter

Paper number: 1877829151121761 – Hospital discharge of the elderly - an observational case study of functions, variability and performance shaping factors

Authors: Kristin A Laugaland, Karina Aase and Justin Waring

In this cover letter we describe how we have addressed the reviewer’s comments. We thank the reviewer for positive, constructive and insightful comments and suggestions.

Listed below are the original reviewer comments, followed by the authors’ responses in yellow.

Authors’ responses

Reviewer 2: Leslie Myles

It remains unfortunate that the data do not have a stronger presence in this revision – for the moment the voices of the subjects only break through the analytic framework once. This is a particular challenge on pages 19 and 20 where the perceptions and words of patients/family would add considerable depth to the argument. While I might re-introduce my concern that the FRAM is obscuring the data, thanks to the rewrite, I now understand the authors’ broader intent, and so while I feel the voices of the 20 subjects and their providers ought to be more central, I am prepared to have this be a matter of opinion rather than quality. The paper is, more or less as is, in a position to make a contribution to knowledge and the debates surrounding discharge. Again, well done.

We understand the reviewer’s request and desire for a stronger presence of data in the revised manuscript. However, as the reviewer also acknowledges the intention of the paper being the identification of characteristics (e.g. functions), general patterns of variability in discharge performances, and performance shaping factors rather than addressing the specificities of each of the 20 cases. This will certainly be done in succeeding publications. We have addressed the issue in study limitations as suggested by the reviewer.

Pg5: First full paragraph: “Specifically, the main aim…”
Rereading this after completing the paper I understand it, but on my first pass through I became tangled in the ‘identification’ and ‘explanation’ of variability (and other objects of study). A suggested rework is:

Specifically the aims of the paper are to identify:
- The functions of hospital discharge;
- The areas of variation within those functions, and;
- The performance shaping factors (PSFs) that may explain those variations.
To accomplish these aims we gather and incorporate the perceptions of not just health care providers, but patients and their next of kin.
The authors appreciate the suggestions made by the reviewer and we have revised the wording accordingly.

Specifically, the main aims of the paper are to identify:

- The functions of hospital discharge;
- The areas of variations within those functions, and;
- The performance shaping factors (PSFs) that may explain those variations.

To accomplish these aims we gather and incorporate the perceptions of not just healthcare providers, but patients and their next of kin.

Pg6: First full paragraph: This is a very helpful and well written addition. We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.

Pg7: First full paragraph: Last sentence: Again, a very helpful and important revision. We appreciate the positive feedback.

Pg8: First partial paragraph: “Coordination Reform was implemented…” Please provide a fraction (no more than a rewording and possibly a short sentence) more background about Coordination Reform. Doing so will make the sentence more active and remove the present impression that this policy appeared out of the ether to plague the lives of hospitals and municipalities.

We have rewritten the sentence and revised it to: The Coordination Reform [17] was implemented in January 2012. One of the main focal areas of the reform is to stimulate a high quality patient flow between hospitals and primary care institutions and to overcome challenges with delayed discharge better known as “bed blocking” (i.e. patients blocking beds in specialist care while awaiting municipal services (Majeed et al. 2012).

Pg8: First partial paragraph: “Hospitals and municipalities are also…” A potential rewording for greater clarity here is: Under the terms of Coordination Reform, hospitals and municipalities are obliged to enter into legally binding contracts that set out formal requirements for care transitions and discharge planning.

We appreciate the suggestion for re-wording and have revised the sentence accordingly.

Pg13: First full paragraph: “This study identified…”
It is not immediately clear how a function (as defined in FRAM) can include a perception (as held by a stakeholder). For the moment the (very helpful) bullet list that follows appears to set out a list of necessary but not necessarily sufficient conditions for a discharge to occur. How these include perceptions is unclear. Please expand on this.

The functions were “observer identified” rather than being identified by healthcare personnel, next of kin or patients. However, the functions were described and perceived by the various stakeholders as essential activities for hospital discharge to succeed. Thus to avoid confusion we have revised the sentence to “The set of functions represent essential activities necessary for hospital discharge to succeed”.

Pg14: Second full paragraph: “We found considerable variability…”
You introduce THREE main dimensions, but the bullet list below includes only TWO items. Please adjust.

As the reviewer points out the bullet list included two bullets but addressed three items. To add clarity we have presented the items in each bullet as displayed below:

1. **Timing** (the time of day the discharge functions were carried out).
2. **Duration** (the time spent performing the functions).
3. **Precision** (performance characteristics and perceived success of the function by the various stakeholders).

Pg21: Second Full Paragraph: “This study also found…”
Consider deleting ‘well’ as this normative assessment is not attributed to any of the stakeholders in particular and so comes, in the reader’s mind, to be attached to the authors.

The sentence has been revised and “well” has been deleted.

Pg25: First Full Paragraph: “Our findings illustrate…”
Consider replacing “very routine function” with “commonly occurring function”

The sentence has been revised according to the reviewer’s suggestion to: “Our findings illustrate how hospital discharge for elderly patients is a commonly occurring function, though it varies in numerable ways.

Pg29: Limitations Section
Consider addressing choice to present minimal data in analysis in this section, explaining that as a result of the small sample size you have chosen to focus on the method’s applicability to the task rather than the specifics of your case study.

We appreciate the suggestion made by the reviewer and have addressed this concern in the limitation section by including the following sentence: “Following the aims of the paper we have chosen to focus on the FRAM’s applicability to hospital discharge to explore its characteristics (e.g. functions) and general patterns of variability in discharge practices rather than addressing the specificities of each case”.