Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 10 March 2014

Reviewer: Helen HA Alm

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting manuscript. The manuscript addresses an important area of research based on a well described background and well-implemented data collection. My comments include:

Minor Essential Revisions

First a few editorial comments.

1. Spelling “next of kin” is done in two different ways, with a hyphen or (mostly) without - and one time “next of kind” (p.9).

2. "Ways to manage or dampen possible occurrence of uncontrolled performance” (p.7). Is that the intended meaning or do the authors mean uncontrolled variability or uncontrolled performance variability?

3. The paragraph “Setting” (p.8) lacks dot and end brackets.

4. Double dots in the 2nd paragraph in “Data analysis” and there are some double spaces in the manuscript (simply corrected by search and replace).

5. The names of the functions are not uniform. At first I interpreted the text after the dash at the first two functions as description or output from the function. A short description of each function in table 3 would be welcome.

6. A “d” is missing in the fifth function in the list of functions in Results (p. 13). “Notify and inform the…”

7. “The interesting question how these functions may vary on a day to day basis in everyday discharge practices”. The sentence is missing an “is” (last sentence before “Performance variability…”).

8. P.17 “available to plan…” should be “availability…”

9. In the citations (p17), I am not sure whether it is correct as stated or if it is a slight error in translation - shouldn’t it be “increased risk” instead of “increased chance”?

10. P.18 “… on the day he was determined medically fit or if he/she…” Maybe there should be he/she the first time as well.
11. Review the sentence “New discharge planning demands...” (3rd sentence below the heading “Degree of patient participation and engagement of next of kin”).

12. A space is missing in the same paragraph as above in the sentence “Time allotted to each patient...” and one space missing in the 3rd paragraph under the heading “Quality of the information transfer”.

Discretionary revisions

The authors three aims are “(1) To identify the common functions of the day of discharge that constitute hospital discharge of elderly to primary health care services, (2) to identify variability in these discharge functions and (3) to describe performance shaping factors contributing to variability” (p.2) it is also stated that the paper applies the first three steps of the FRAM (p.7) in line with the study aims. I have two comments on this regarding the use of FRAM as method and the aims of the study:

13. The three aims appear to be more of methodology than aim. The aims are telling the reader how it has been done - rather than why. This paper holds discussion and conclusions with great findings but the concluding sections do not relate to the initially presented aims to a sufficient extent. Distinguish between objectives and approach. Maybe the aims need to be reviewed and perhaps be replaced by a more comprehensive aim? On p.6 it is mentioned that “the purpose of the study is to apply and develop the FRAM to hospital discharge for elderly patients”.

14. The descriptions of the functions according to the six aspects are missing (the definitions of the aspects are shown in figure 1). The step describing the functions is a vital part of the method guiding the user to explore new functions, finding (sometimes unexpected) couplings between the functions and providing the user with a stop rule on when there is an adequate amount of functions. Have the authors skipped this step? If not – I, as a reader, would like to see examples of described functions. If the step is skipped a comment on why the authors have chosen not to implement an important part of the analysis would be welcome. The authors mentions “successor functions” (p. 27) and “functional dependencies” (p.29) but these connections between functions are not clear to the reader when there are no aspect descriptions. The authors have made an interpretation of the method that they may give the reader some reasoning behind, but (not to forget) - they have got interesting results out of it.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.