Reviewer’s report

Title: How do large-scale systems change? A systematic review

Version: 4 Date: 16 December 2013

Reviewer: Patrick Hudson

Reviewer’s report:

Since the publication of To Err is Human the patient safety movement has spawned large numbers of interventions. This paper is important, in many ways, because of what it fails to show or hints at— the very small number of rigorous wide-scale studies, the disparity between the time it takes to have measurable effects and the time devoted to the study, the issue of whether safety culture and organizational factors lead improvement or result from it. One conclusion I find interesting, concurring with my own experience, is the effect of time on cultural change, taking more than two years.

The weakness of the paper as written, that it is a pile of facts culled from the studies under review, is inherent in the subject matter and the variability in the methods and results. I would appreciate an attempt at making the results section easier to read (Table 3 certainly helps here). I would also appreciate more discussion of why the results, including some of the apparent contradictions, are as the studies found. While the authors were scrupulous in their selection of the studies for review, they could usefully use reference to the wider literature in their discussion.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.