Reviewer's report

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

Version: 4 Date: 2 January 2014

Reviewer: Naomi Fulop

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

i) Authors need to clarify the main question they are addressing - at the moment it is confused in terms of whether they are addressing WHETHER changes made within large-scale systems can improve patient safety and/or HOW these changes can be made i.e. organisational factors for successful implementation.

ii) if they are focusing on the 'how', they need to refer to the fairly extensive literature on eg the role of contextual factors in quality/safety improvement. see eg Kaplan et al Milbank Quarterly 2010.

iii) once they are clearer about i), the authors need to justify why a traditional 'Systematic Review' is the best method for addressing these questions. If they are attempting to address the 'how' question, the narrow focus of this review means that they have excluded studies using qualitative methods which address these question and are important for understanding how to improve patient safety on a large scale. see eg Dixon-Woods, Milbank Quarterly. 2011.


iv) The discussion of organisational factors for successful implementation reads rather naively at present. E.g. to conclude that 'leadership' is an important factor is not very helpful as it does not distinguish in any way between different types of leadership which might be effective. Again, there is some evidence on this which the authors should refer to and the discussion also needs to take account of this literature already referred to above.

v) The narrow focus of their search means they have missed some important studies e.g. Pronovost et al (2006): http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMo061115a

Can the authors justify this exclusion?

- Minor Essential Revisions

None.

- Discretionary Revisions

Please note that both the comments entered here and answers to the questions below constitute the report, bearing your name, that will be forwarded to the authors and published on the site if the article is accepted.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

None.