Reviewer's report

Title: Implementation of the quality management system in Lithuanian palliative care hospitals

Version: 1 Date: 24 April 2006

Reviewer: Marilyn Bookbinder

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Summary

The manuscript purports to report the results of an “assessment of the implementation of quality management systems in Lithuanian palliative care hospitals.” Although the topic is an important one for understanding the barriers and facilitators to processes of implementing quality programs, the manuscript has methodological deficiencies that weaken the internal validity of the study and therefore strength of the findings and their ability to make strong recommendations. See below for specific comments.

Abstract

The abstract contains information not supported by the narrative. For example, the abstract states that heads of Lithuanian palliative care hospitals were interviewed. The narrative report describes a quantitative survey questionnaire that was developed and mailed to hospitals.

Background

The background describes a national movement toward bringing quality systems into the Ministry of Health. A focused literature review related to the facilitators and barriers to implementing programs, particularly in Lithuania and palliative care in general, would have been helpful to understand the need for the study and previous work leading up to this one. If literature is not available, the authors need to describe the search strategies used and propose their study as a first attempt to describe “current implementation of a QMS.” No theoretical approach is used to answer the research aim- however the ISO 9000 standards are briefly mentioned. If these standards form the conceptual framework for the study, they need to be described and related to the selection of questionnaire items developed by the authors.

Methods

Several aspects of this section need more development.

A. Sample: It is not clear who completed the questionnaire. Demographics about the sample are needed.

A. Design: The design approach is not consistently reported: were interviews conducted or mailed surveys used or both. A good response rate was reported, however, more detail is needed about the length of time given for the sample to respond and more specifics about the program implementation period, e.g., the length of time of program implementation would provide the reader with the scope of responses and relationships between time and degree of implementation. This survey might be viewed as a cross-sectional design: a one time assessment of palliative care programs in Lithuanian: perceptions of program heads. A. The QMS, the intervention implemented in palliative care programs, needs to be explicated, and specifically what aspects were adapted for palliative care. The definition of QMS alone- is too vague for the reader to know what is being examined.

A. Questionnaire: Four major question groups were the basis for item development. Sample items from the survey would have been helpful â€“ to understand the sampleâ€™s responses. Relationships between the ISO 900 standards and QMS would have been helpful.

Results

A. The results section would be strengthened if results were described in terms of perceptions. Conclusions are made that go beyond the level of data described. A Spearman rho correlation- of .30 is weak yet significant. (.05). Using terms such as “suggests” might be more appropriate than “demonstrated” when interpreting the strength of the evidence and the conclusions that can be drawn. How was employee knowledge measured? Again, it would have been helpful to see the items
Discussion
An: The conclusions described go beyond the level of data obtained. The authors need to acknowledge limitations of their research, methods, sample, questionnaire items, strength of statistics used, and probably of type 1 errors. Without information about the sample completing the survey and their characteristics, i.e., length of time in position, it would be difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Recommend eliminating qualifiers such as management satisfaction is “strongly” associated with quality management knowledge. (see Table 2).

Overall:
This is a very important baseline survey which should be disseminated to palliative communities attempting to improve quality care. Recommendations include that the authors rethink their approach to writing this report and describing results. Efforts to avoid over-interpreting data -with consideration to the level of data obtained would improve the accuracy of information presented and encourage receive for a positive review. Thank you.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'