Reviewer's report:

Title: Involving deprived communities in improving the quality of primary care services: does participatory action research work?

Version: 2 Date: 13 January 2007

Reviewer: Scott Murray

General. A well and clearly written article from one of the poorest urban areas in Scotland, where the local GP backed by another academic GP and expert qualitative researcher seek to involve the local community in improving GP services in Drumchapel.

Qualitative methods clearly described and justified. The results are clear, and the conclusions are fully justified and indeed modest. Interestingly after a similar study in my own practice area in 1992, we also fixed automatic doors (and a ramp!)

The discussion usefully highlights a number of areas, eg defining "community", and the last paragraph about communities are precluded from having meaningful control due to the current top-down health service management is important evidence in the current health service context.

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

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct) Change last sentence on page 6 to past tense.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Dissemination of the findings was largely through newsletters and the GP attending PCO meetings. More active yet still participative methods could have been made eg the team of 4 continue to meet together and advocate by writing and visiting, as was done in the study below:
This RPA probably resulted in more responses because of this and also because a number of local professionals had been previously interviewed as key informants as well as the users. Could this be mentioned in discussion?

The authors found that national top-down priorities swamped the local issues. We also found this in Edinburgh, and the following could be cited along with ref 15. that their finding
Brown C, Lloyd S, Murray S. Using consecutive Rapid Participatory Appraisal studies to assess, facilitate and evaluate health and social change in community settings. BMC Public Health 2006, 6:68

I wonder if the authors might suggest how PAR might work more effectively to produce change, in a few bullet points to guide further developments for Local Health and Social care bodies. Should questions focus on improving their own services, or on the wider aspects of improving health which might be of greater interest to the respondents?

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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.