Reviewer's report

Title: Coordination and integration in primary community care networks (PCCNs): a national demonstration project in Taiwan

Version: 2 Date: 14 February 2007

Reviewer: Ingrid Mur-Veeman

Reviewer's report:

General

Points of assessment as given by Biomed:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
The question is interesting, especially because it refers to the Taiwanese situation, but not new. Measuring nature and extent of integration of networks has been done earlier. However, the question as posed by the authors is not well defined: it is too broad and rather vague. It is about studying the nature and extent to which Taiwanese PCCNs network or infrastructures have been coordinated and integrated. This is not further explained.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
The theoretical basis lies in the literature review, which gives a short and rather superficial overview of the concepts and opinions of various authors. There is no critical discussion of the literature and at the end five “dimensions of coordination and integration” (whatever that may be) fall out of the blue as the aspects that will be investigated in the Taiwanese situation.
Concerning the methods, the authors say in the summary that the questionnaire’s validity and reliability is confirmed, but in the methods’ part they do not explain how they did this.
They calculate averages, but this leads to superficial and maybe even incorrect conclusions (if you work with averages you also have to calculate sigma either). It is not a basis to arrive at reliable and valid conclusions concerning the described dimensions of integration.
They also do not give any argument for the choice of their methods. Why only a structured questionnaire? What is the result of not involving the hospitals into the research population? (biased data, at least). Why do they so heavily rely on calculated averages? They know the dangers of this method, I suppose.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
The presentation of the data is not well structured and to the point. The results of the total questionnaire are represented in the appendix. The table is interesting, but also confusing, unclear and too long. Also, the data are presented in a confused way.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The answer is no. See the comments above. Additionally, also the description of the PCCNs is unclear and leaves a lot of questions, like: Who launched the health reforms? What is the political and internal context? How are the PCCNs financed? Who are the stakeholders? What about the internal structure of the PCCNs? Also the figures at page 5 are presented in a confused way.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
This question can not be answered because the data are not sound and well controlled and the conclusions are broad and vague.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Also the title is vague. It can cover everything as long as it is about integration of primary care community networks. The abstract conveys what has been found: broad and meaningless conclusions in general terms.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
The English is acceptable, but the explanations are in general, broad and rather abstract terms. It results in a vague story.
Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The question posed by the authors should be more and better specified in the beginning. It is better to ask in what respects integration is achieved and to specify the aspects to be investigated. It is also necessary that the readers know what the authors are talking about, when they speak of integration and coordination.
   (in fact, they have to start with this).

2. The authors should build a conceptual model, based on literature study and properly argued, so that it is clear what the research is about and why they focus on certain aspects.

3. In stead of calculated averages per question, they should use scales of relevant items to measure the “dimensions”. The items should be linked to the operationalised definitions of the dimensions. This also requires validity testing of the scales (e.g. with Cronbachs alpha), that will lead to more valid, reliable and precise conclusions. The authors have to explain in the paper how they carried out the validity and reliability testing.

4. The authors should further adapt the data in order to present the data to the reader in an acceptable, clear and informative way. For each dimension of coordination and integration mechanisms, presented under a separate sub-heading, a table with the relevant results should be presented followed by their comments and interpretation. Again, to come to a sound presentation, it is also necessary to use other methods of statistical analysis (see point 2).

5. The authors should give more, and precise, relevant information about the PCCNs in a non-confusing way. Put the figures at page 5 in a table.

6. The title should be changed in such a way that it more precisely reflects the content of the paper. Also the abstract and broad concepts that are used have to be specified, especially the concepts integration, coordination, dimensions of integration and coordination.

7. The authors have to specify their conclusions and make them more concrete, in stead of talking about broad subjects like "...the network partners could rethink and apply the internal governance and management activities to make their network processes more smooth and efficient." What are they talking about? Who are the network managers? What is more smooth and efficient? How to apply in more concrete terms?

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

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 limited interest

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