Reviewer's report

Title: It's all about relationships: A qualitative study to explore researcher's perspective of conducting interdisciplinary health research

Version: 1 Date: 29 January 2008

Reviewer: Kevin Dew

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written paper, logically ordered and addressing the issue of interdisciplinarity in a way that to my knowledge has not been done before.

I think there are a few areas that could be developed to enhance the argument that is being made in the paper.

Major Revisions:

1. There is a fairly succinct but limited discussion of the literature e.g. commentaries from researchers about the actual process of interdisciplinarity could be included e.g. Lewando-Hunt (2000) in Social Policy and Administration. Also on page 5 it states that papers have documented the difficulties of interdisciplinary research â## it would be useful to have a brief summary of these difficulties.

2. In my opinion more discussion on methods and methodology is required. Under â##Samplingâ## reference is made to a number of strategies â## a definition of a critical case approach should be provided and an illustration of how it was used in this research. It is common to cite â##saturationâ## as a reason for completing an emergent sampling framework but it is stated somewhat glibly here. Does that mean no more â##themesâ## emerged â## or that all the theoretical constructs were â##saturatedâ##?

Under Data Collection reference is made to three email attempts and if no response was received no further contact was initiated â## but the authors also claim that all of those who were invited agreed to participate. So it is not clear what actually happened here.

Under Data Analysis it is claimed that a content analysis approach was used to â##extract recurrent themesâ##. No rationale is provided as to why only recurrent themes were of interest and this seems to contradict the search for â##disconfirming evidenceâ##. However, it is not clear what â##disconfirming evidenceâ## means in this context â## as the authors have not talked of developing a theoretical model â## so what is being disconfirmed?

3. The discussion notes that researchers in this sample did not â##deeply ponder epistemological debatesâ##. I personally found this rather intriguing. Given the different epistemological positions that are likely to be present in interdisciplinary
research, particular between social scientists and clinicians, it seems very surprising that these issues did not feature in the interviews. Could the authors reflect on why there was an absence of talk about epistemological differences and the difficulties that can arise, for example, in the interpretation of data. Was this a product of the interview schedule used, the interests of the research team or something else?

4. A number of statements are made in the “Conclusions” that have not been supported by references or evidence (and this could occur if a more thorough discussion of the literature and the context of interdisciplinarity was included in the paper) e.g. that a scenario had been created that interdisciplinarity was “a trendy or passing ideal,” and that interdisciplinarity had been made “suspect.”

Minor Essential revisions:

1. As far as I am aware numbers less that eleven are usually written out e.g. not “2 disciplines” but “two disciplines”.

2. There are some typographical errors e.g. “better how cognizant” on pg 9.

3. In the “It’s the way we work” section there is a paragraph on junior researchers at the bottom of pg 13 “this paragraph does not fit with the title of the section and so should be moved elsewhere or the section re-titled.

Discretionary revisions:

1. Some points could benefit from further discussion or clarification e.g. pg 16 refers to the view that some felt that small teams were ideal. Is that just a personal preference or is there some theoretical reason related to interdisciplinarity that explains this? Or alternatively, would this idea vary according to the research question being asked and what sort of expertise would be required?

2. In the Discussion it is suggested that, as there is a gap between the literature definitions and researcher definitions of interdisciplinarity, this “warrants more explicit exploration.” But why? What would be gained from such an exploration and if something is to be gained how would this be explored?

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

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:

I declare that I have no competing interests