Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluation of the impact of implementing nursing guidelines on delivery of care in hospitals and community settings

Version: 1 Date: 5 June 2007
Reviewer: Gill Harvey

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a clearly written and well presented article on an interesting and important topic, namely translating research evidence (in the form of clinical practice guidelines) into practice. The main weakness of the paper is that it attempts to present a large amount of information within a single paper. This results in a limited amount of discussion around some really important issues, for example, what about all the guideline elements that were not implemented? Why were three of the guidelines (breastfeeding, delirium-dementia-depression and smoking cessation) poorly implemented. To some extent, this is always the case when presenting an overview of a study. However, for a more balanced discussion of the findings, I would like to see the authors address the less positive findings from their research.

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

The authors conclude that implementing clinical practice guidelines can improve practice and patient outcomes. Yet in terms of the overall findings, almost half of the indicators assessed (47.6%) showed no difference before and after guideline implementation. For three of the guidelines ((breastfeeding, delirium-dementia-depression and smoking cessation), over 80% of the indicators showed no change after guideline implementation. For a balanced discussion of the findings, I would like to see the authors explore these issues in some more detail as one could could argue that the findings are rather ambiguous in terms of supporting the case for guideline implementation improving practice and patient outcomes. Clearly the guidelines did not make things worse (except for a small number of isolated indicators), but there are large areas of practice that appear to be unchanged following guideline implementation - a fact that the authors pay relatively little attention to within the article. Given the resources involved in implementation (e.g. staff time, training etc), I think this finding needs to be explored further. The authors don't make any reference to the costs involved in implementation - are there any data on this?

Minor Essential Revisions (using 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)

The authors do not make any reference to user involvement in guideline development (page 6). It would be interesting to know the extent to which users were involved.

Whilst appreciating the rationale for adopting a multi-facted, multi-level implementation strategy, the findings give little insight into which (if any) of the different elements of the implementation strategy were most important. Are there any qualitative or observational data that would shed light on this?

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