Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 13 June 2007

Reviewer: Anna Ehrenberg

Reviewer's report:

General
This study reports on a prospective, before and after intervention to evaluate the impact of implementing nursing practice guidelines on asthma, breastfeeding, delirium-dementia-depression, foot complications in diabetes, smoking cessation and venous leg ulcers. The study is well motivated by the existing limited knowledge about how research-based practice can be implemented in an effective way.

There are some major weaknesses in the study design, which are also acknowledged by the researchers in the discussion section of the manuscript. A controlled design with a randomized sampling procedure would have been preferable, to provide a basis for firmer conclusions based on the findings. As a convenience sample was used, selection of participating units hampers the possibility to draw conclusions. In addition, control units would have strengthened the design considerably. However, it is understandable that it is often difficult to accomplish experimental designs for complex interventions in health care, as those used in this study.

Although existing knowledge is sparse concerning which implementation strategies are most successful in implementing guidelines for evidence-based practice, there are systematic reviews that give some guidance in this matter, as for example Grimshaw et al. in Health Technology Assessment 2004;8(6). Grimshaw et al. report that a combination of various implementation strategies does not necessarily increase the success in guideline dissemination. In order to learn more about what implementation strategies to use in nursing, it is needed to conduct studies comparing the effects of using various single and combined strategies. In this study the complexity of implementation methods used makes it difficult to know whether any strategy was more conducive in achieving changes in process and outcome.

To conclude, this study adds knowledge about the potential impact of a comprehensive implementation strategy to implement nursing practice guidelines in various clinical areas. However, more rigorous designed studies are needed to develop reliable knowledge about the most conducive strategies to support evidence-based practice.

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

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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)

The description of the implementation strategy needs to be more elaborated to provide the reader with more detail about the intervention. For example, how was the assessment of barriers and facilitators undertaken, what were the findings and how was this handled in the implementation process?

More detailed descriptions about the content of the educational sessions for health care staff should be added. It is now described as “...issues of immediate concern to nurses”, which is not sufficient in order to comprehend the intervention.

The methods for assessing process and patient outcomes are briefly described. Some detail on how health records were retrieved and audited should be added to provide information enough for replication studies.

Clarification regarding how inter-rater reliability was assured in record audits, observations of patient techniques, and in patient interviews is needed.

It would have been helpful to have more information on the context of each participating health care
organisation, as contextual factors may have considerable impact on the success in implementing evidence-based practice. The finding of significant negative outcomes in some of the organisations may be explained by contextual factors or historical events during the course of the project.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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.