Reviewer's report

Title: Researching the mental health needs of hard-to-reach groups: managing multiple sources of evidence.

Version: 1 Date: 20 July 2009

Reviewer: Vikram Patel

Reviewer's report:

This paper aims to describe a novel methodology for assessing access to mental health services. I found the paper difficult to read, and this could in part be due to my inability to follow the logic of the paper. I hope that my comments may be useful to you to make this clearer.

1. Your paper seeks to describe a methodology, rather than the results of this methodology, which you suggest will be published elsewhere. But the paper seems to focus on access to CMDs as the over-arching theme, confusing the reader as to whether this paper is describing a new methodological framework (in which case, the paper should focus on existing frameworks, their limitations, how the new framework seeks to address these and use the CMD study as an example) or whether it is about the application of the framework to a specific question (in which case, we are left with only the bones of the meal as the meat is going to someone else’s feast).

2. Your introduction is all about CMDs…apart from the fact that at times you also mention eating disorders, please note my first point: is this paper about CMDs or about a methodology? If the latter, then the introduction needs rewriting?

3. Identifying key concepts: on page 9 you mention a search filter developed by the National Primary Care Research and Development Centre: is there a reference or web-link for this?

4. You draw our attention to five overlapping concepts: I must admit I found the links between these and the subsequent discussions the most difficult to follow. Can you clarify how each of these fits in with the logical framework that leads to the ‘gathering evidence’ stage.

5. My biggest concern, however, is that I am not clear how this methodology involving so many steps is any different from another methodology involving fewer steps. For example, its not clear to me how your methodology is, firstly, different from the mixed methods approach many others routinely use; many authors use a combination of published and gray literature reviews and stakeholder interview data. Secondly, why are the 6 to 7 steps any better than, say, 3? Surely some steps are redundant as they lead to a subset of evidence already gathered (and this seems the case if you examine the table). Your synthesis of the evidence which seems to draw on all the evidence concludes with results that seem hardly unexpected: working with patient explanatory models and focusing on both psychological and social issues seems hardly a
novel finding? What is original here? I am sorry if I have missed the picture, but here is an opportunity to revise this.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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'