Reviewer’s report

Title: The development of integrated care services in the Netherlands: an empirical study towards a development model.

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Reviewer: Allan Krasnik

Reviewer’s report:

The development of integrated care services is a major health policy issue and a challenge to the health care systems in all countries. It is therefore a relevant and interesting research theme to study developmental processes and the elements of integrated care related to these – which are the stated objectives of this manuscript.

The methods used are quite complex involving a series of sub-studies performed including literature studies, a Delphi study and concept mapping (phase one) and an expert session and a two phase questionnaire study (phase 2). The present study is primarily presenting results from phase 2, but building on phase 1. The methods used are well presented and explained and based on generally recognized procedures for defining, categorizing and prioritizing concepts, methods, procedures etc. However, in the light of the complexity of the study methods a table or graph presenting the procedures and elements of the design would be helpful to the reader.

The data are based on sound and well presented procedures for data collection and analyses, however it is not clear why weights of 3 and 1 are appropriate and assigned to the scoring of the “most relevant” versus “also relevant” scores.

The presentation of data is clear, but I would suggest some major changes in order to improve the reading of the article (see below).

The discussion of the results provide a fair picture of the main findings in the light of the existing (sparse) literature in the field presented in the introduction, however, possible effects of the choice of experts and procedures (including interpretations and decisions of researchers) are not thoroughly discussed. The effect of the Dutch setting is mentioned, but also not thoroughly discussed. The general value of the results in other systems very much depends on this.

Abstract and language is acceptable. The title might mislead some readers to expect observations, interviews etc focusing on a specific developmental project involving processes of integration rather than results of a survey among a broad range of experts representing different institutions and sectors and a general development in the country.

Major compulsory revisions:
1. Table 2 is very text intensive and includes important descriptions of the phases. I would suggest that the main content of this table is transferred to the text in the result section. A table might still be added presenting the key data.

2. Whereas table 4 does present the main findings in a clear and relevant form, table 3 is very large and detailed presenting a large amount of basic data. This table would make much better sense as an appendix rather than a substantial part of the article itself. Selected main aspects of the table could additionally be described in the text.

3. The section on limitations and implications should include a more specific and substantial discussion on possible problems of validity caused by the design, choice of experts (and their attachment, roles and experiences).

4. The section should also discuss (and not only mention) the effect of the Dutch setting (the actual structure of Dutch health care, the present integration processes and actual integration status) in order to support the international relevance of the article.

Minor essential revisions:

5. The use of percentages in the text is mainly based on quite small numbers – the absolute numbers (n/N) should be mentioned in the text for instance on page 13, line 3.

6. Reference 29 should be fully presented (with name of journal) or replaced by referring in the text to own not yet published results/personal communication (depending of the journal rules for this type of references).

Discretionary revisions:

7. A table or figure presenting the procedures and elements of the design could be added in order to give a better overview of the sub-studies included.

8. The graphic information of figure one is limited and the main content could just as well be part of the text.

9. The title could be more explanatory in the light of the general national setting which is the basis of the study.

**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.