Reviewer's report

Title: Supervision, support and mentoring interventions for health practitioners in rural and remote areas: a systematic review and thematic synthesis of the literature to identify key mechanisms for successful outcomes

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Reviewer: Adrian Schoo

Reviewer's report:

The authors need to be congratulated on this interesting study. The topic is important and the paper is likely to be of great interest to the readership.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

This study is of interest and addresses a gap, although there are some issues that need to be addressed to make it paper tight and focused.

The aim of this study will benefit from how supervision and successful implementation are defined. Is supervision the same as mentoring, and is it confined to peer-supervision or does it include line management? Is clinical supervision training considered since it may develop leadership skills? And what about mentoring, is this similar to supervision? This may require updating the inclusion and exclusion criteria and to define the terms in line with how the studies were selected from the yield.

Also, the introduction of the paper starts with making a link between CPD and quality of health services and associated outcomes. There are some missing steps into the introduction. It will be useful to introduce workforce retention and rural health outcomes as issues.

(Although not arduous, these are essential revisions that are compulsory)

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Inclusion and exclusion criteria may need amendment in line with above definitions and the way it was determined that papers were included or excluded.

(minor essential revision)

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported
by the data?

Is successful support program implementation determined by content, for example, whether it delivers what people want to know (or be able to do) or by what they ought to know (or be able to do), or by sustainability of the program? Although this all may sound arbitrary, there is some evidence that younger professionals (up to 30 years of age) want to have CPD that focuses on clinical content whereas their older peers have interest in CPD that is likely to enhance their self-management, teamwork and leadership skills. Ironically, there is evidence that younger ones (up to 30 years of age) are the ones that experience stress due to issues that amenable through support and training.

In relation to the assumption that CPD has a positive effect on workforce retention, the evidence so far is not convincing. There may be new evidence but this is needs to be addressed in the introduction or in the discussion section. It will be useful to identify this issue as a theme, provided one or more of the papers have researched this, because retention is flagged in the introduction. If retention is retained as a factor then it will be important to include this in the discussion, otherwise it seems a bit of a red herring.


John Humphreys, John Wakerman, Robert Wells, Pim Kuipers, Judith Jones, Phil Entwistle and Pam Harvey (2007) Improving primary health care workforce retention in small rural and remote communities: how important is ongoing education and training?

(These are essential revisions that are compulsory)

Figure 2 illustrates the findings (key mechanisms) in a condensed format. The layout may be enhanced when all outcomes are positioned on one side of the page, and (as much as possible) in a hierarchical order as supported by evidence.

(Discretionary Revisions)

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title 'Supervision, support and mentoring interventions for health practitioners in rural and remote areas: a systematic review and thematic synthesis of the literature to identify key mechanisms for successful outcomes' seems to reflect the content, although the abstract need some amendment in line with the paper.

(Discretionary Revisions)

7. Is the writing acceptable?

The paper is well written.
I have made comments throughout the paper that are in line with the above comments and trust that these will be of benefit.

(Discretionary 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 have no competing interests