Reviewer's report

Title: Implementing and managing self management skills training within Primary Care Organisations: A national survey of the Expert Patients Programme

Version: 1 Date: 9 January 2006

Reviewer: Elizabeth Kendall

Reviewer's report:

General

The paper provides an interesting analysis of a very important movement in healthcare (i.e., the integration of self-management into standard health systems using a top-down policy driven mechanism rather than a bottom-up self-determined approach driven by consumers). Reach and commitment of PCTs may not be the most important implementation issue that will prevent the implementation of EPP using this mechanism. The authors discuss this fact and give important voice to the need for alternative delivery arrangements to ensure access and equity for all consumers with chronic conditions.

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

-- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct) --

Given the international nature of the journal, it would be preferable if the authors clarified some terminology that seems to be particular to the UK EPP programme (e.g., EPP Leads, the nature and role of PCTs, local agencies, centres etc.). Although readers can assume the meaning of this terminology, it may be incorrect.

-- Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore) --

Differences between PCTs in implementation is interesting – the paper provides some discussion of factors that differentiate "champion" PCTs and "failed" PCTs, but these factors are relatively benign (e.g., size, future funding allocations to EPP, % Lead time allocated to EPP). However, of more interest may be the constitution of the PCT consumer group and the health demands in the region.

Recruitment was noted as the most common (92%) factor associated with cancelled courses – which PCTs were most likely to cancel courses and why was recruitment an issue in these regions? Is recruitment a difficulty due to the lower commitment to EPP within that PCT or could recruitment difficulties reflect different needs/constitution of client groups in the area?

If recruitment is associated with commitment of time by Leads, then it is reasonable to conclude that increased funding for Leads is a priority for the future. If, however, recruitment is problematic due to the inappropriateness of the course or some other factor, then more fundamental issues need to be addressed to ensure sustainable implementation. For instance, it is possible that recruitment issues are associated with the population demographics of the area, the skills of the Lead in marketing, etc.
The assumption that the programme has limited reach to those with long-term conditions due to an implementation gap may be correct, but the suitability of the programme for this population may also be an issue.

Given the type of analysis conducted and the available data, it is plausible that demand for self-management courses within each PCT district (or competing demands for other interventions) may predict the level of commitment of the PCT to EPP, as well as their allocation of budget and % of time. The lack of ability to conclude causal relationships should be acknowledged.

It is also plausible that larger PCTs run more courses simply because the have larger staffing and budgets and, therefore, have a greater presence in their communities, leading to increased capacity to recruit and run courses. They also are likely to have greater demand for courses simply by virtue of larger populations.

It should be acknowledged that there may be more meaningful ways to determine the categorical status of PCTs (i.e., champion or failed) rather than the absolute number of courses they have run (e.g., courses run relative to demand in the community, or even just population size).

Irrespective of PCT size, greater % of time allocated to EPP lead to more courses being run, but it would be interesting to understand the nature of the time allocation (i.e., what tasks required greater time – recruitment, training of tutors, maintenance of tutors, organisation of enrolment, running of courses, future planning etc.). The data indicates that greater time allocation was also associated with fewer cancelled courses, more significant planning for the future, more tutors. Which of these factors is associated with success and which Lead tasks facilitate these factors? There is a need to focus the time of EPP leads so they are achieve maximum outcomes within the complex demands of PCT regions.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential 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.