Reviewer's report

Title: Lessons from the evaluation of the UK's NHS R&D Implementation Methods Programme

Version: Date: 7 August 2006

Reviewer: Ian Graham

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an interesting and valuable paper that speaks to the value of national targeted funding for implementation research. It attempts to document the outcomes of the Implementation Methods Programme (IMP) as well as present the lessons learned for the experience. The paper should be of considerable interest funders of research.

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

1. More detail on some of the methods is required:
   - re the questionnaire to lead applicants (p3)- “following an extensive process to encourage participationâ€” please describe the extensive process
   - re questionnaire to potential users (p4)- explain why heads of midwifery and perinatal researchers were surveyed- were all 36 topics about midwifery issues?; include the response rate in the same para has been done with the other paragraphs about data collection

2. Results. If possible, provide a table listing all 36 projects in the rows and in the columns provide: study design (SR, pilot, qual study, RCT etc), the references to the products of the research, impact factor, number of trainees, perceived impact of the research, etc- ie combine the data from tables 2-6 and reported it for each project. Throughout the paper I kept wanting to have a better sense of what the 36 projects were about. Tables 2-6 can remain as the synthesis of this master table. Readers need to have a sense of what was funded to be able to contextualize the evaluation results.

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

1. Table 3- please define considerable, moderate and small contributions. Explain the decision to restrict this analysis to 15 projects

2. Table 4- define considerable, moderate and small contribution from the IMP project

3. p4 publications- the texts states that Oxmanâ€™s review- No Magic Bullets, was more frequently cited than the coulter â€™99 paper- how much more cited?

4. p4- future research- explain the rationale for why the 1.3 million pound cut off used to select 15 projects (same as point #1 above)

5. p5- dissemination- is it possible to indicate how many of the presentations to academics and practitioners were at national/local vs international meetings? Presumably the 104 presentations were at the more local level.

6. p6. 20 priority areas- could a listing of the 20 be included in the paper?

7. p6 last para- is it possible to quantify the proportion of projects that were pilots, RCTs or SR? similarly I would be interested to know how many of the 36 projects were awarded to commission group members (p7
conflicts of interest). Perhaps a better title than conflicts of interest is needed since the last sentence of the para indicates that the authors do not believe that there were conflicts

8. p7- need for a communication strategy- please provide more detail on the demise of the programme (if this is known).

9. p 7 case studies- provide more rationale for selection of these two particular cases.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. From the perspective of a research funder this is a very interesting paper in its current format- an evaluation of the Implementation Methods Programme. From the perspective of an implementation researcher, it could be made somewhat more interesting if the paper was explicitly framed as a study of the implementation of an organizational change (the IMP). The paper already has information about how the IMP was created (which could be expanded slightly to include more on barriers and facilitators to implementing the programme) and the tensions among advisory and commissioning group members which impacted the direction of the research commissioning (a barrier?). Table 1 describing milestones could be enhanced to describe in more detail what the IMP involved. What is missing is a discussion of why the IMP was terminated (ie. the lack of sustainability of the programme). The lessons learned presented in the discussion really speak to many of the implementation issues of the programme. All that is needed are specific recommendations to research funders about the launching, organizing, operating, disseminating, and evaluating of such programs, presuming the authors believe there is value in such programmes.

2. p6- commission research- I would be interested in hearing more about the interactive support the programme provided to applicants. This sounds fairly innovative and understanding why there were differing views about the value of this among the commission group should be explored in some more detail.

3. I would like the authors to explicitly offer an opinion on whether they believe their study provides sufficient evidence to support the use of implementation research commissioning strategies- ie. do large scale strategic research funding approaches advance implementation science to justify their expense?

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.