Reviewer's report

Title: Physician attitude toward depression care interventions: implications for implementation of quality improvement initiatives

Version: 2 Date: 1 June 2008

Reviewer: Louise Parker

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions: None; authors did an excellent job at addressing most major concerns.

Minor Essential Revisions:

There are still several minor problems with the description of the analyses. I believe the authors can easily address these as I am confident they are not problems with how they conducted analyses but how they describe their work. They simply need to provide a bit more detail. The authors write, “All transcripts were then coded using this scheme by one team member with Atlas software v5 [24]. A second team member independently coded a subset of the transcripts manually; results were compared to ensure reliability.”

1. I am unclear first about how the coders assigned codes; the authors should clarify what they did. Here are the possibilities:
   - Some member(s) of the team pre-determined what the quotations would be (literally, where they would stop and start) and then the two coders independently coded the same quotations.
   - Each coder created quotations and assigned codes as they believed appropriate based on their understanding of the narrative; as such, one coder’s codes will not map exactly on to the others (i.e., they will differ in terms of where they stop and start). Please note, this is not necessarily a problem and can be resolved through discussion.

2. Further, I am unclear of the basis for determining where a quotation should stop and start. Such bases include:
   - Constructing quotes so include a full idea even if it is only part of one turn in a conversation or crosses several turns
   - Constructing quotes using some arbitrarily predetermined guidelines (e.g. a full response to a question, one turn in the conversation, a sentence, etc.).

Classically, people use meaning to determine where a quote starts and stops, as the goal is to understand the informants. So quotes can be anywhere from one word long to several paragraphs. Also, as coders compare their work, they may alter the limits of a quotation to convey the informant’s meaning most precisely. The authors should clarify what they did.
3. The authors write that they compared results to ensure reliability. The authors need to clarify what they mean by “compared results”. There are several methods for doing this. Classically, two coders review each other’s work and then discuss and resolve differences regarding what codes they assign to a particular quotation. Additionally, if the coders created their own quotations based on meaning (versus some arbitrary criteria as above), coders also discuss and resolve differences regarding what the limits of a quotation should be so that it expresses a full idea. They then utilize a coded transcript that reflects all of this discussion.

4. When thinking about how they describe their data analysis methods the authors should note: Using two coders improves one type of reliability problem but creates another. When coders check each other’s work they increase the probability that coders apply a construct consistently across the data set (i.e., do not drift in their understanding over time). On the other hand, as it is impossible for two people to think exactly alike, the introduction of a second coder automatically introduces a measure of unreliability. Despite the introduction of a second reliability problem, the advantages of having a second coder may outweigh its disadvantages. Not only can a second coder help with drift but together two coders are also likely to achieve a deeper understanding of the data than one alone could. Qualitative data is often ambiguous and thus two heads are usually better than one in helping to resolve such ambiguity.

5. Finally, I find it a bit odd that one investigator coded using Atlas and the other did not. Atlas is just a tool that eases the ability to refine coding and retrieve quotations. It is certainly not necessary to use and I do not think acceptance of the article should hinge on this matter. The authors should explain what the manual coder did (e.g., wrote in the margins) and how the two coders worked together as they used different mediums.

Discretionary Revisions: None

**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.