Reviewer's report

**Title:** A Social Marketing Approach to Implementing Evidence-based Practice: The TIDES Depression Collaborative Care Model in the Veterans Health Administration Quality Enhancement Research Initiative

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 2 February 2007

**Reviewer:** Martin Eccles

**Reviewer's report:**

**General**

These are combined comments from series Editors Martin Eccles and Ian Graham. This is an interesting article that tackles an important topic. We are sorry for the delay in getting back to you but, in order to deal with the series of articles as a whole the pace has been dictated by the getting the last reviews of the series.

**General comments for authors of all articles**

1] Please remember that you are writing for an international audience. In some cases it seems the papers make comments that seem directed at the VHA and these should be deleted - you need to be thinking much more globally and presenting lessons learned and perhaps recommendations for how best to do implementation research regardless of what your own system is like. The DETAIL of VHA structures and funding are of no interest to an international audience. If you wish to make reference to funding it should only appear in the acknowledgements section and not in the body of the text.

2] Related to [1], all articles have a plethora of abbreviations, many of which relate to VHA specific structures functions or procedures. In general these should be described in generic terms and the number of abbreviations kept to a minimum.

3] You need to be clear about who will be the main audience for both these and the rest of the papers- if it is seasoned implementation researchers then sometimes the information seems rather simplistic; if it novel implementation researchers/facilitators then sometimes more clarity is needed- either way the papers need a more similar pitch to the intended audience. We think that the readership is the interested implementation researcher or policy maker.

4] You should use a standard description of the QUERI process both in the text and Table. However, the Journal web system will not retain the formatting so I will send you the preferred version as a separate email attachment. Ideally, this should be introduced early on in the article and then referred to as appropriate throughout.

Overall could you ensure that the article conforms to the journal style as specified in the instructions for authors (http://www.implementationscience.com/info/instructions/default.asp).

There are only one set of referees comments available; the second is due within the next two weeks. Rather than delay any further we have chosen to send you the single reviewer’s comments and the editorial comments now. We will forward the second reviewer comments once they arrive.

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

Overall the manuscript reads well and is an interesting example of the use of social marketing techniques for the promulgation of a system wide intervention. The abstract offers a structure for the article and the main text should try to stick to it. At the moment there is a lack of clarity and consistency in what is written.

At the beginning of the paper (2nd sentence) and again at the end (last sentence) the point is made about the VA being a change --resistant agency- can evidence be provided to support this? Actively resisting and undermining are very different barriers (and require different interventions) from indifference and avoidance even though both result in adoption failure.

Is there no empirical evidence for social marketing in the literature that could be cited - you present the theoretical rationale supporting it but what about all the health promotion campaigns - have none of them been evaluated? What is the efficacy/effectiveness of social marketing? Can no data be offered in support of the approach?

As the reviewer comments it would be more interesting if the examples could be more closely tied to the
content of the paper. The illustrative table needs to use TIDE examples not smoking cessation ones.

You describe characteristics of the marketing team but don’t say what scale of enterprise it is and what the overall timetable for implementation is. This would be interesting information for readers. Linked to this, it is unclear whether (and if so, how much) of the activity described is underway and how much is being described as activities planned for some point in the future. The text is contradictory on this (Page 5, The DSG is therefore developing a TIDES National Dissemination Plan (NDP) that establishes goals in 4 areas; Page 12, Below we describe the marketing plan being developed to promote implementation of the TIDES; Page 14, A team of VHA researchers, administrators and clinicians is currently marketing TIDES). This should be clarified and the tense used in the text should then consistently reflect this.

Is there any evidence that can be marshalled in support of the sequential behaviour change process?

It may be helpful to separate out into a separate section the “activities and data” that the planning group had (previous published studies, the ad hoc attempts at wider implementation that informed the plan) from the plan of proposed activities. The “activities and data” are currently scattered and this lends to the lack of clarity about what happens when.

It is not clear what you mean by “Although TIDES most closely fits within QUERI Step 4, it has also performed short-term (6 month) outcomes assessments usually associated with Steps 5 and 6. Longer-term (18 month) outcomes are currently being assessed.”

Could you clarify this in terms of the Table (above). From the QUERI framework I guess that you mean something like that you have completed steps 4, 5 & 6 for phase 1 and 2 studies but only have 6 month outcomes for a phase 3 study. Whatever the position, could you clarify it? It would then be illuminating to both clarify and discuss the fact that phase 4 activities appear to being planned / underway without the full results of prior studies. This suggests aspects of the framework that are more fluid than has been suggested by the other papers in the series (none of which have really got to phase 4). Is this a result of knowing how the system works and having to do this to avoid loosing momentum OR pragmatism armed with six month outcome data, OR key individuals deciding it is going to happen no matter what? A discussion around this could be very illuminating about the various trade offs in play.

On page 13 paragraph 2 TIDES has an I missing.

In general the section on evaluation is very weak and under specified. It would be more informative with more specific detail. You say that a number of TIDES and Re-Tides evaluative criteria relate to the social marketing approach – could you say what these are? You also make some (speculative) suggestions about evaluation of the marketing activities – linked into the point below about timeframes it would be good to tighten up the text so it is clear that these are (I think) all proposed. If this is the case it would be helpful in the discussion to reflect on the fact that Phase 4 activities may be underway (see my comments about timeframe) without a pre-specified evaluation framework. You suggest in the discussion that you feel your results will be generalisable - what is the analytical strategy of such a programme evaluation and how does it relate to other programme evaluations? You will have an end stage outcome (how many units adopt the care model) but what assumptions will you need to make to attribute this to the marketing activities? I accept that you may not be able to completely answer this. If this is the case, it is a further reason for discussing the absence of a pre-specified evaluation and you should also tone down your end of discussion beliefs.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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.