Reviewer's report

Title: A systematic review of the use of theory in the design of guideline dissemination and implementation strategies and interpretation of the results of rigorous evaluations

Version: 1 Date: 15 March 2009

Reviewer: Gene Feder

Reviewer's report:

This paper reports a systematic review of primary studies evaluating the dissemination and implementation of guidelines with controlled studies. The review question of this paper, although it is not clearly articulated in the body of the text, is to what extent is theory used in the design of guideline dissemination and implementation interventions and interpretation of their controlled evaluations. Their findings are that only a minority of interventions in studies up to 1998 were based on theoretical frameworks.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
New, definitely; well-defined, mostly, although they omitted to articulate the review question clearly in the text.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
Yes, particularly if the reader refers to the detailed description of the general review methods in the HTA report of which this paper is a spin-off. My only criticism is the flawed method used by the reviewers to decide if a study is theoretically based. In my opinion there should have been two reviewers making an independent decision, with a 3rd adjudicator. The method the authors used leaves open the possibility that papers are mis-classified by first reviewer. This is not a major flaw, as it is unlikely that the conclusion of the review would have changed.

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?
Yes, with the major caveat that the search on which the review is based is now
10 years old. As there is a temporal trend towards more theory based interventions being trialled, this makes the review of historical interest only, in my opinion. I think readers would want to know the state of play in 2007 or 2008 not 1998.

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

7. Is the writing acceptable?
More than acceptable; it is well structured and clearly written

Major compulsory revision: Updating of review, with my apologies to the authors, as they may not have the capacity to do this.

Optional revisions: using a second reviewer to judge whether a study is theoretically based

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.