Author's response to reviews

Title: Does Accreditation Stimulate Change? A Study of the Context and the Impact of the Accreditation Process on Canadian Healthcare Organizations

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer 1

Major compulsory revisions

First Paragraph: The reviewer suggested that the paper is not sufficiently grounded in the literature. We have addressed this question and the paper now includes 70 of the most relevant studies on accreditation. The reviewer also suggested that our research question was not clear and that it seemed to solicit what changes to standards were required: he pointed out that the research questions did not match the discussion. We concur with these observations and have clarified and condensed the research question accordingly. The reader will now find the discussion directly patterned on the research question.

Second paragraph: The reviewer asks us to detail the analytical framework and explain how it is equivalent to a model of change. While we do not have the space to describe the framework in great detail (note that we reference the study from which the framework originated), we have added text to clarify it further. We have also renamed Figure 1 in order to address the reviewer’s concern with our reference to a model of change. The reviewer also suggests that we compensate for our focus on Canadian HCOs by expanding our discussion of the issues associated with accreditation and related issues of organizational change. We have reworked our discussion accordingly. As for the reviewer’s suggestion to link organizational change to the quality of care, we regret that we do not dispose of the data necessary to address this very compelling question.

Third paragraph: Every point in this paragraph has been addressed specifically by changes to the text. We have rewritten the study design and method; discussed the principal elements of Table 1 in the text; explained the differences and similarities between institutions; clarified the distinction between focus groups and interviews; and so forth. Please contact us if you would like an exhaustive listing. We also removed Tables 2 and 3 because they did not provide more information that what we discuss in the text. Regarding the interviewer’s question of whether it is correct to call a RHA a HCO, we did not feel it expedient to introduce this debate in the text but can assure the reviewer that in the cases in question, the RHAs did indeed function as HCOs.

Fourth paragraph: In accordance with the reviewer’s suggestions, we have reconstructed the findings section, linking the data from the tables to the text and adding data to support our discussion and recommendations. We do not present the findings according to the three phases of the accreditation process and the tables have been completely reworked. We believe that the reader will now find that our claims of the relationship between the accreditation process and social capital, mergers and the learning curve will be substantiated.

Fifth paragraph: The referencing has been adjusted to comply with journal requirements.

Minor essential revisions

All of the minor essential revisions have been addressed.
Reviewer 2

Major compulsory revisions

1. The accreditation program has been clarified and the reviewer’s other questions answered in the text.

2. In our “Data analysis” section, we added a sentence indicating which kind of method (inductive or deductive) we used to analyze the data according to our theoretical framework.

3. We have discussed Case 3 in greater detail.

4. We concur with the reviewer’s argument that organizations can employ opportunistic behaviour for change and to seek additional funding (see results and discussion). We also agree that change does not necessarily bring improvements in quality, and that change is not always sustainable. However these questions exceed the scope of our paper.

5. Again, we concur entirely with the reviewer’s observation that accreditation reports do not include much information about patient outcomes. This explains why we were unable to discuss the contribution of accreditation to patient outcomes.

6. We have added a sentence to the effect that our results were indeed modified as a result of case study staff validation.

7. In response to the reviewer’s excellent suggestion to discuss strategies and incentives to increase physicians’ involvement, we have added several examples of the same. Because of the space limitations, however, we were unable to discuss this subject more comprehensively.

8. We have added a sentence to clarify the role of risk management and medical responsibility as motivators.

9. We have added to our discussion of the literature in the discussion section (our references now number 62).

10. We have elaborated on the presentation of our results to people involved in the process.

11. This comment echoes a comment of the first reviewer. Accordingly, we have related our findings more closely to our theoretical framework throughout.
Regarding hospital size, it is true that literature has related quality improvements to hospital size. However, hospital size is just one condition of many and our small sample size made it difficult to estimate the effect of hospital size on changes more directly.

We have elaborated further as per the reviewer’s suggestion.

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While we agree that sustainability is a very important issue, it was not the principal subject of this paper.

As per the reviewer’s suggestion, we have concluded our paper with implications for policy, research and practice. The question of mandatory versus voluntary accreditation has been discussed in another paper [cite] and space limitations prohibit us from linking it to the present findings.

While we concur that patient outcomes are a subject of pressing interest, they were not the subject of this study and we did not feel it appropriate to make recommendations regarding their measurement.

This comment consists of an interesting suggestion for future research.

**Minor essential revisions**

The formatting changes were made.

This issue has been addressed.

We have done as the reviewer suggested.