Reviewer's report

Title: A realistic evaluation: The case of protocol-based care

Version: 3 Date: 26 February 2010

Reviewer: Tim Rapley

Reviewer's report:

I think this paper is great – it is clear, accessible and engaging. I think they have taken a reasonably opaque epistemological approach – realistic evaluation – and given the reader access to practicalities of the process and nicely outlined its potential.

I've only got some very (very, very) minor comments, queries and typos:

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Page 2, abstract: ‘features bout what works’
2. Page 9: Why have (only) two sites got ‘ethnography’ in brackets after the description?
3. Page 14: ‘trying out them out in practice’

Discretionary Revisions
4. Page 6-8: It would be nice if you could very briefly unpack how, practically, you got from review findings to ‘initial propositions’. How tricky/easy did you find this stage?
5. Page 8: At the moment, I don’t really ‘get’ Figure one, could you unpack it message and function in your discussion a bit more?
6. Page 10-13: At the moment, your discussion of findings/examples is quite bereft of any references to other work that nicely echoes aspects of your findings. You could, if you feel the urge, add a few key references.
7. Page 14: In reference to the mundane troubles of enacting realist evaluation, of shifting between principle and practice, this is routine for enacting all novel craft-based practices – which I take research to be (and actually, given your research topic, routine for those practices labelled ‘protocol-based’).

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests