Reviewer’s report

Title: Explaining the effects of a multifaceted intervention to improve inpatient care in rural Kenyan hospitals - interpretation based on retrospective examination of data from participant observation, quantitative and qualitative studies.

Version: 1 Date: 7 September 2011

Reviewer: Liz Grant

Reviewer’s report:

1. Question well defined. The authors have made it clear what the study is aiming to do, and provided sufficient information to allow readers to understand that the study is using data collected from previous studies to respond to a hypothesis generated to explain variations in intervention effects.

2. It is initially not so easy to work out what is happening in the methodology. This is partly because the methods section starts with a long and important explanation about the methods of the previous base study and it merges into the methods for this study. It may be useful to rewrite this section so it is very clear up front what this study is doing, and why this is a unique approach, and follow it with the background explanation. Worth also keeping the language very clear and free of metaphors, side comments on expressions etc. It is useful to have the theoretical constructs underpinning the analysis outlined but the summary is very intense with a range of theoretical issues and options all brought together into a somewhat unclear analytical package. The paper may benefit from a less packed commentary on theoretical positions and more clarity on how theoretical positions were used to understand, interpret, test and report data. The authors do note that they were unable to return to the original sites to test the theoretical frameworks.

3. Data are sound and well controlled as far as is possible given the nature of the study and its use of data generated for the founder study. Data are really important, the whole area needs much more exposure and this paper is an excellent start in drawing attention to what many people have known for some time but not adequately dealt with in workforce development.

4. Manuscript does adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.

5. Discussion and conclusions are well written and balanced. There is a wealth of data available and the authors have done well to present it in an accessible form. It would be useful to include more commentary on McPake’s paper (55) and perhaps reflect on her model of dynamic change as in the light of the current findings as McPake does provide additional thinking in the area of workforce decision making and action.

6. Title and abstract do reflect the content of the paper.

7. Writing is acceptable. A little dense at times, which makes it more inaccessible.
than it needs to be, for example “A normative re-educative intervention approach evolved that sought to rest norms and values concerning good practice and promote ‘grass-roots’ participation to improve delivery of correct care”.

8. No major compulsory revisions, though I personally would suggest that the methods section be rewritten so that it has a clearer flow and readers know exactly what the methods for this study are, they get a bit lost with the methods of the founding study.

9. Minor revisions: A few times I was not sure whether there was a typo or whether the sentences were exactly what the authors wanted to say (ie as in previous quote, did the authors meant to use the word “rest” — possibly or possibly not? It’s an odd though not impossible construction.

10. Discretionary I would recommend a more nuanced comment on the business and HR literature around workforce development. Also making language more accessible