Reviewer's report

Title: Methods and Metrics Challenges of Delivery System Research

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Reviewer: Charles Vincent

Reviewer's report:

This paper addresses a number of important issues in the evaluation of interventions to improve the delivery of healthcare. The paper is based on a report commissioned by the US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and is therefore presumably a condensed summary of a longer document. The authors set out five core challenges and make a number of recommendations for future research, both conducting and commissioning. One particularly important conclusion is that funders should consider much more substantial evaluations that are able to address the various facets of complex interventions as they unfold over time.

While the content of the paper is valuable it is not very accessible to readers who are not already expert in the field. The paper also gives little information about how these conclusions were derived or why these particular issues were prioritised. It appears that the Discussion of the report has simply been grafted onto a short introduction, leaving aside the central core of the report which presumably addresses these issues. While I appreciate that the paper must inevitably not cover all the material contained in the report I think that the authors could do more to provide the background to their conclusions and to help readers not well versed in implementation science to gain an understanding of these important issues.

Specific suggestions

The authors should add a section summarising the process of writing the main report explaining how the literature was addressed, the methods they employed and the reasons for highlighting these particular areas. Clearly all are important, but why do these five stand out? Surely there is also a more natural order to the presentation of these themes?

The authors have helpfully given a common structure to each theme considering challenges and recommendations in turn. However the content of these sections does not always mirror the heading. For instance ‘recommendations’ under context (p 7) begins with a helpful section defining what contextualisation actually is, but only after the challenges have been outlined. I suggest that, particularly for less expert readers, that each of the five themes could usefully begin with an additional sections called ‘Definitions and background’ or something similar. A short paragraph summarising the key issues and definitions would help enormously. This would then be followed by challenges and recommendations.

I would also suggest that some examples might be provided of studies that have
managed to address these challenges, at least in part. Table 1 is extremely helpful summary. I suggest that if five short boxes were added, one per theme, with a brief example of a relevant study, this would greatly help readers to understand and appreciate the recommendations being made.

I realise that these suggestions on their own would increase the length of the paper. However I believe the current content could be reduced, particularly if readers could have access to the main report (presumably available from AHRQ?) to follow up particular issues. Overall I would favour a more accessible paper with more explanation and examples even if it does end up a little longer. I believe this would be make best use of this valuable material and the paper would be more influential as a result.

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

No competing interests