Reviewer's report

Title: 'Getting a grip on depression': implementing a stepped care approach in primary care. Results of a qualitative study.

Version: 1 Date: 7 June 2011

Reviewer: Kate McLintock

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Summary - The authors performed a qualitative interview study to examine the perceptions of clinicians who had been involved in a Quality Improvement Collaborative (QIC) implemented to enhance adoption of a stepped care model for the management of depression. Analysis of the results of these semi-structured, qualitative interviews was supported by the Normalization Process Theory (NPT). Results were presented under the three principles of the stepped care depression QIC before being summarised in relation to NPT constructs.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
The question is well defined. A number of related studies have been published on the efficacy of stepped care initiatives, in addition to quantitative and qualitative studies concentrating on component parts of the programme (e.g. the management of depression in relation to depression rating scale scores and clinician/patient views of these tools), and the use of qualitative methods to guide the development of a stepped care protocol.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
Methods are suitable. Some lack of detail is evident, for example, how participating multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) volunteered for, or were recruited to, the QIC is not made clear. Description of data analysis could also be refined; the sequence from thematic coding, ordering around stepped care principles and application of the NPT mechanisms is a little vague.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
Data appear sound and adequately controlled.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Reporting omits some of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) criteria, for example, information on relationship between researchers and participants, duration of interviews, distribution of participants between primary care MDTs.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported
by the data?
Discussions and conclusions are balanced and adequately supported by data.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Title and abstract are an accurate representation of the study.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
Some language corrections are required. For example, page eight; ‘if any result was particularly applying for their team,’ consider switch to ‘if any results was particularly applicable to their team.’ Page 16; ‘but this proofed not to be working,’ change to ‘but this proved not to be working.’

Major Compulsory Revisions - The authors should expand their description of study methods in line with COREQ, or any other recognised guidance for the reporting of qualitative interview studies, in particular being more explicit about the process of data analysis.

The authors do not make clear whether the depression QIC was a success, or not. As such we do not know whether we are examining the processes of an intervention that was effective or ineffective. It is therefore difficult for readers to judge what elements of the intervention or stepped care actually worked (or did not work) in bringing about change. The authors should expand on this point.

Minor Essential Revisions - Whilst it is valid to use NPT solely in analysis to guide interpretation and conclusions the theory could have been made more integral to the study, for example, in planning, implementation, integration or coding. This may have improved the coherence of the study. The authors might wish to comment on this.

The authors could consider expanding their discussion of what this paper adds to the existing, related literature.

Grammar and language should be reviewed.

Discretionary Revisions - No further suggestions.

Other comments
• The question was well defined, but the methods should be clarified.
• I agree with the authors that additional interviews and data collection throughout the period of study may have strengthened the analysis and conclusions.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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