Reviewer’s report

Title: Change agency to promote evidence-informed health care: A realist synthesis

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Reviewer: Vicky Ward

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This has the potential to be a useful paper, both from a methodological perspective (report of a realist review) and in terms of its focus (on change agency). In my opinion, however, the authors will need to address some major issues before this paper can be published.

1. Although the review process is described in detail in a previous paper, there does need to be more detail here in order to help the reader understand the process and findings of the review. Reading the manuscript, I found it hard to distinguish the reported review from a more traditional systematic review. This is further emphasised by the authors focus on the 'impact' of change agency on knowledge use in their review questions (rather than on the mechanisms per se).

2. Related to this point, I found the introduction and background difficult to follow. In particular, the background does not seem to add much to the introduction section. What is missing from both sections is a thorough justification of the focus on 'change agency'. Instead, the evidence on a range of different types of interventions (audit & feedback, computerised prompts) is outlined, none of which seems to clearly relate to the topic of this review.

3. As above, the method section needs to contain more detail relevant to 'realist' review.

4. Overall, I find the findings section relatively weak and lacking in detail. It would be very helpful to see further detail and illustration of each of the points uncovered in the review. A table showing the key points alongside the relevant papers might help here, but as a reviewer I currently find it difficult to have confidence in the findings due to the lack of detail.

5. Related to this, I would like to see the authors unpack their definition of knowledge use further, since it is difficult to see how the characteristics of the change agent or the 'context' relate to 'impact'. In fact, the authors need to consider more carefully how the question of impact fits into the realist review process - it is my understanding that the process encourages a deeper theoretical understanding of precisely how interventions work. This does not come across clearly in the findings.

6. It is unclear to me what the authors mean by the 'characteristics' of the change agent. For instance, at times they discuss personal characteristics, such as age and a positive attitude. At other times they discuss what could be termed characteristics of the role itself (or at least the way the role has been set up) such
as accountability and accessibility.

7. A similar point can be made about the 'setting' for the change agent intervention. I would like to see clearer definitions of 'setting' versus 'context'. Setting could mean the size of the team/group the change agent is working with, the type of organisation, or something more broadly to do with the culture of the team/organisation. At present there is insufficient detail about these areas. Similarly the term 'embedded' (i.e. change agents being embedded in an organisation) is not defined and the lack of illustrative detail makes it difficult for the reader to interpret.

8. The lack of detail in the findings section carries through to the discussion and conclusions, which both need to be strengthened considerably on the basis of the findings.

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

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'