Reviewer's report

Title: Convergence and Divergence in Implementation Narratives: Analyzing Variation in Qualitative Data

Version: 1 Date: 8 March 2012

Reviewer: Karen Willis

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. The notion of critically analysing differences in views and how they relate to implementation of interventions is of great interest to me. However, in this case, I think much more work needs to be done to provide a convincing account that can usefully inform implementation science. My main concern is that the authors have taken a basic and foundational understanding of qualitative research and made it extraordinarily complex - qualitative research is predicated on understanding differences. ANY study of merit seeking stakeholder views on implementation of an intervention needs to account for all the viewpoints, so in that sense, this study doesn't offer anything new - indeed the authors have made this basic insight into a complex and dense account when it need not be. The following are all major compulsory revisions, but I am unsure, given the data set the authors are working with, whether they can be achieved.

1. The article needs to be much more closely grounded in the implementation literature. The background provided is a cursory overview of qualitative methods but does not take account of the literature that has already been published on how to study implementation.

2. Similarly, the lack of theory about implementation, and about change, means that the study is not grounded within existing ideas or has a theoretical framework that can inform the study direction, analysis and conclusions.

3. There needs to be much greater clarity in the method presented - at times it is unclear how the bigger study relates to this study and I suggest that the section be rewritten for clarity. Other aspects are also unclear. For example, asking clinic leaders who should be interviewed is not theoretical sampling. It is unclear how the authors are using the idea of a 'case study model', or even if they are doing so. The complex description of the coding process doesn't actually assist the reader to know how the data were analysed - this could be reduced to a couple of sentences. While coding is important, it is what researchers do with the codes in the analytic process that is of more interest, and this isn't well explained. The references to 'contextual validation' also are unclear. All of this critique suggests that the authors need to ground their method much more clearly within the qualitative methods literature.

4. Carefully consider the conceptualisation of the data - what is presented are not implementation 'narratives' in the sense that most qualitative researchers would recognise. They are themes.
5. Consider how the data can be presented thematically - the separation into sites does not work and is repetitive and descriptive. Much of what you have labelled as 'divergent' doesn't read as such, in some cases what you have presented is a slight variation only and you may get different insights into the different views expressed if you read inductively from the data instead of trying to fit the data into the categories you have identified. The table with the presentation of data is confusing, for example I wonder whether 'psychologists are co-located in primary care' (Site Alpha) is a theme - is it more a finding of fact that participants agree on?

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.