Reviewer's report

Title: A Qualitative Assessment of Practitioner Perspectives Post-Introduction of the First Continuous Professional Competence (CPC) Guidelines for Emergency Medical Technicians in Ireland.

Version: 2  Date: 19 February 2015  Reviewer: Janet Curtis

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the article “A Qualitative Assessment of Practitioner Perspectives Post-introduction of the First Continuous Professional Competence (CPC) Guidelines for Emergency Medical Technicians in Ireland” by Knox, S., Dunne, S., Cullen, W. & Dunne, C.

My comments follow under the required headings.

Major compulsory Revisions

1. More detail is required in the methodology section concerning the NVivo coding themes or framework – it is unclear from the tables if the boxes represented the coding themes or were just a summary of comments made by the participants under the headings provided. The coding framework should be included in the article. More data can then be presented using the themes, coding and connections found through the software. None of this analysis is presented.

Discretionary Revisions

2. It is generally accepted that focus groups have no more than 15 members to ensure everyone participates and should be facilitated by a person/s who are trained in focus group facilitation. It is unclear if the Principal of the Civil Defence College meets that requirement. My suggestion to the authors is to change the name of the groups from “focus groups” to something else e.g. forums, due to the points above.

3. One theme coming out of the discussion was the difference of the population group to front-line EMTs. It was clear they did not have the same opportunities on the front line, the workload or patient contact as EMTs in the HSE. Either in the introduction when the population group are first introduced, or in the methodology, a description of the role of these EMTs be given so that the reader has a better understanding of the background of these participant EMTs. They appear to have a different role to what many readers may understand of an EMT. A ‘setting’ section could be included in the methodology section to address this matter.

4. It is unclear what connection the student EMTs have to Continuing
Professional Competence and what they have to offer that is different to the experienced EMTs. In my country the students are not part of the CPC until they are employed in an ambulance service or become volunteers in the service. This could also be addressed in the ‘setting’ section.

5. Not being a resident of Ireland, the use of “etc” in line 75 offers me no understanding of the extent of the voluntary organisations that have EMTs in Ireland. Apart from the ones named, I do not know of any other others, or how many there are. This could be remedied with a table within the text outline the organisations and the numbers of EMTs in each. If there are too many the table could be placed in an appendix.

6. Following on from the comment regarding NVivo, I found the tables a little confusing and would like to see them formatted a little more clearly. Questions 1 and 3 seemed to use the same headings for both cohorts but question two didn’t i.e. students had “points of clarification” while experienced EMTs had “questions, duties, patient contact. Many of the points of clarification under the student EMTs seemed to follow a similar theme to the experienced EMTs.

7. Can the authors say “the EMTs unanimously accepted CPC” given the limitation noting they may not have heard every voice due to the size of the groups?

8. The authors also state “both cohorts appear to have a reasonable understanding of what a learning portfolio is and what it should be used for”. The one comment given in the Q4 table for the students doesn’t reflect this to this reviewer’s understanding of what a learning portfolio is. Were there more comments that haven’t been presented? The comment shown do not support the comment made by the authors.

Minor Essential Revisions

Line 298 – remove the ‘and’ before ‘supports the findings….’

Line 289 – possible remove ‘that’ and say ‘practitioners should learn from their own ….’

General Comments

Overall I found the article well written and informative, with a clear statement of what the objectives of the study were. It was evident the data presented met these objective with a good overview of comments, questions and suggestions made by the participants in response to the questions asked. It would be good to see more data presented as the NVivo software is capable of much more than was presented.

My other concern with the methodology, which was addressed by the authors in the limitations section, was the size of the focus groups and the possibility not everyone participated in the discussion.
It is obvious this works build on previous work by the authors, who were involved in the early stages of the development of the CPC.

**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 I have no competing interests