Reviewer's report

Title: Determinants of change in a practice accreditation program in primary care: a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Karen Fairhurst

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper examining qualitatively the impact of a practice accreditation program in the Netherlands. It reports upon a qualitative study embedded within a cluster randomized trial of the program.

Major compulsory revisions

1. My major substantive issue with the paper is the clarity of the research question. The authors state the aim of the study as “to identify and map out determinants of change related to the practice accreditation program”. This is not unpacked in any further detail so we are left to wonder what the nature of the change might be e.g. sustained change in practice organisation, delivery of care, engagement with quality improvement activity, clinical outcomes etc. The framework used for analysis then suggests that the research question might be “what are the factors that influence the implementation of the program or the quality improvement activities that arise out of the accreditation program”. The findings as reported tend to answer the question “what aspects of the program worked (or not) for which practices in what context”. In the discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study the authors state it contributes to a body of knowledge on determinants of outcome. The authors might consider re-defining their research question (and the title of the paper) and being consistent throughout the paper.

2. The choice of interviews to explore the experiences, perception and behaviours of professionals participating in the program is appropriate. The sampling of professionals who had participated in the program is clearly appropriate however details of the eventual sample could be clearer. How many practices were invited to participate in the interview study? Was one interview carried out per practice. How was the person interviewed selected - i.e. did they self nominate?

3. Data collection methods appear to be systematic. The analytic approach is comprehensive. Further detail of how the coded statements correlated to the steps in the accreditation program were then applied to the CFIR constructs is needed. The authors state that 8 interviews were “coded by all authors” – does that mean that the 3 step process was completed by all authors? How was consensus reached and how were discrepancies resolved?

4. In terms of the presentation of results there was overall a lack of analysis. The reader was expected to accept at face value statements without corroborating
evidence or analysis being presented. For example line 194 “implementing plans were experienced as a heavy burden as these are supplementary task in addition to daily practice” is not evidenced. In terms of analysis it would also have been appropriate to test if there were situations in which this was not burdensome, and what these situations were. Similarly the cost of the intervention (line 205) were perceived as high and the benefits were questioned in relation to the costs but the costs were not explicitly described (financial, time, resources etc). And similarly line 227 “participation in research projects etc …provided a positive influence on implementation of the program” but the reasons for this were not explored.

Minor Essential Revisions
The paper contains a number of grammatical and syntactical errors which sometimes makes it difficult to read and these should be addressed. The following list is not exhaustive.

Line 76: positive effects
Line 93: participated in “the” accreditation program
Line 113: second component ….is based on this feedback.
Line 114: participants who
Line 139: the accreditation program
Line 160: All participants consented to recording
Line 164: Eight practices declined to participate in the study
Line 181: therefore should be
Line 193: other elements of the program such as
Line 197: consisted
Line 211: several participants defined the aims of their improvement plans so that the needs of patients could be met.
Line 219: as a contextual factor
Line 221: …were, as training practices, connected…
Line 222: a positive influence
Line 241: a factor associated with the enthusiasm
Line 265: unclear meaning
Line 276: more assistance from
Line 281: relating to quality of care
Line 292: benchmarks
Line 292: new sentence starting “A possible reason”
Line 305-306- syntax wrong
Line 309: the practice accreditation
Line 310: which assessor
I think the paper presents some potentially interesting findings but that these are underdeveloped in terms of addressing the aim of the paper perhaps because the research question remains somewhat unclear.

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 I have no competing interests.