Reviewer’s report

Title: General Practitioner contributions to achieving sustained healthcare for offenders: A qualitative study.

Version: 0 Date: 05 May 2017

Reviewer: C Tan

Reviewer's report:

This is an important piece of work that emphasizes the role of primary care doctors as advocates for our patients. Congratulations to the authors for working to uncover the issues surrounding the facilitators and barriers to healthcare access for this vulnerable group. Being a qualitative study, it provides the breadth of issues relevant and specific to the setting in UK and is important for policymakers to ensure justice for the offenders.

I would suggest some additional information in the methods section to strengthen the rigor of the study.

The authors have declared that they sampled only men. While female offenders are few in numbers, including them would in fact add additional information to the study, as gender-related issues to healthcare access may play a role. A table to give some basic details regarding the participants recruited may also help to support that the authors have sampled a variety of participants, which is recommended in qualitative studies. The location of the interview should also be described, as presence of prison officers during the interview may influence what has been shared.

Freeman's concepts of continuity were only briefly mentioned in the introduction section (lines 72 to 76). The reference cited gave definitions of continuity of care, and not on the factors that influenced the participants' access to ongoing healthcare. Hence, including the initial topic guide used in the in-depth interview will be extremely helpful. The 5 a priori codes used should be described in the methods section. As the authors used interpretive thematic analysis for this study, it would be interesting to see whether the final themes have evolved during the analysis process. This will show the depth of interpretation applied in analysis.
As always, in qualitative studies, data saturation is important to ensure that the breadth of information have been obtained. Was there any process to show that saturation has been attained?

For the results section, I find some overlaps between the themes reported. There seems to be four main parties that influence access to continuity of care: the offenders, the healthcare system, the justice system and the general practitioners. The themes "Individual general practitioners: mitigating difficulties and disruptions" and "limitations faced by general practitioners" appear to be related and also partly related to the healthcare and justice system. Hence, I would suggest that the authors relook into the process of thematic analysis to see whether the themes are the best fit for the codes, and whether they are clear enough to avoid overlaps. Reading the quotes from the participants, I also find that the theme "The offenders' contributions" is not explaining the data clearly. I see that instead, it is "the offenders' persistence for healthcare despite rejections or obstacles" that explains the data.

The discussion part emphasized the role of general practitioners and key findings of the study. It is however still rather brief. The recommendations are general. I would suggest to add more recommendations for future studies to determine the magnitude of the problem and priorities for interventions, in terms of policy and health service systems.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.
No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.
Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.
Unable to assess

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