Reviewer’s report

Title: SPECIALIST LINK AND PRIMARY CARE NETWORK CLINICAL PATHWAYS- A NEW APPROACH OF PATIENT REFERRAL: A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY OF AWARENESS, UTILIZATION AND USABILITY AMONG FAMILY PHYSICIANS IN CALGARY

Version: 0 Date: 12 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Research Square Reviewer 1

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?
Yes - there is a clear objective

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?
Not sure - key details are missing from the manuscript

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?
Not sure - key details are missing from the manuscript

STATISTICS - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?
Yes - appropriate statistical analyses have been used in the study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?
Yes - the author’s interpretation is reasonable

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?
Probably - with minor revisions

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS: This article provides interesting information about the awareness and utilization of Specialist LINK and Primary Care Network Clinical Pathways among family physicians in Calgary, Canada. My comments relate more to clarification than actual concerns about the article
1. Are all family doctors in the target area situated within a PCN (and hence included in the study population)? Were there any concerns about the accuracy or completeness of the lists provided by a PCN? Were there any tests done to check on this?

2. I'm assuming the unit of analysis was the individual physician -- although the comment that follow up was by PCN was somewhat confusing. However, assuming that it was an individual physician, how many PCNs were you drawing from? Is it possible that a nested design should have been considered? For instance, are some PCNs (and the physicians included in them) more receptive to this intervention that others, potentially confounding your results?

3. The response rate was relatively low. This should be discussed in the limitations. Did you consider comparing the sample's demographic profile with the known population (physicians practicing in Calgary and area) to develop a better understanding of its representativeness?

4. On page 6, the manuscript reports that "79% of participants believed the PCN Pathways had changed their clinical practice (n=125)". Is this percent actually "79% of the 55% of the family physicians who were aware of the PCN Clinical Pathways"? The term participant is used to include all respondents and sub-samples of all respondents (I think) which is somewhat confusing.

5. The manuscript mentions that respondents were not always able to distinguish between PCN pathways and other pathways. This is important and likely deserves more attention. More broadly, are the authors convinced that respondents were reflecting on Specialist LINK and PCN pathways and not other strategies that may be in play to connect family physicians and specialists (which, in my experience, often develop quite independently of formal programs)?

6. The analysis strategy seems fine but I would have been interested in a slightly greater discussion of why logistic regression was done and what the added value of it was. Often regression results are provided - without such an extensive presentation of the bivariate/ t test analysis.

7. It was unclear if the response categories for Figures 2 and 4 were provided to the respondents or whether they were provided a checklist. If a checklist, how were the response categories decided upon?

8. The conclusion was basically a very short summary of the results. A proper conclusion, with some implications or recommendations, would have strengthened the manuscript.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:
I have provided comments above. I think this is an interesting article but I have a number of questions seeking clarification about the sample and some of the data collection tools. The paper is also does not really include a discussion section; including this would strengthen the manuscript.

Note: This reviewer report can be downloaded - see attached pdf file.

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.

No

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

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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