Reviewer's report

Title: Incident reviews in UK maternity units: a systematic appraisal of the quality of local guidelines

Version: 2 Date: 11 December 2014

Reviewer: Christiane Schwarz

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Discretionary Revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The context of the work is clear, and the question is logical. If lessons can be learned from incidents, the cases need systematic analysis and follow-up. This requires clear guidance of high quality. The authors conduct a systematic search within the UK, and appraisal with an appropriate instrument. The clear definition of the kind of incidents the guidelines deal with becomes clear on second sight only for individuals who do not work in the UK. In some countries, there may be a different meaning of „critical incident“ („near miss“), adverse incident/ event („patient harmed“) and „sentinel event“. (i.e. maternal death). Obviously, all of the above are defined as „incidents“ in this article (according to NPSAFramework). Maybe the authors could add a few words on this definition.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The AGREE II instrument is a validated tool for the authors' purpose, to appraise guidelines on a specific topic. AGREE II includes good guidance on how to systematically appraise each domain of a guideline, which makes the results transparent and reproducible by peers.

3. Are the data sound?
The data appear sound and trustworthy. The fact that the authors benchmarked the trusts that were examined in their study with those that did not reply adds to the quality of the results.

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?
Yes.

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The manuscript mainly follows the standards the appraisal process that the AGREE consortium suggests, with the exception that “average scores” are reported (line 211-217) while AGREE suggests to rate the domains independently.

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported
by the data?
Yes.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
The authors refer to the fact that not all trusts replied to their request.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
The authors did acknowledge the existing body of evidence. The key publication NPSA Framework for Reporting and Learning from Serious Incidents Requiring Investigation is quoted as 2010 version, although a 2013 update version is available.

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes.

10. Is the writing acceptable?
The writing is perfect. Tables an figures are appropriate.

11. Other:
Some UK-specific abbreviations need clarification: what does a CNST level of 1 mean – does that mean good, or bad quality, or something completely different?

Bibliography:
- 5. and 7. appears to be the same publication?
- 8. the link is broken

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 that I have no competing interests