Reviewer’s report

Title: Relational continuity of oral health care in Indigenous communities: a qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 19 Aug 2019

Reviewer: Fredrick Wright

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting a well presented qualitative study. The project uses both personal and focus group interview techniques to identify community attitudes and beliefs about the barriers and enablers to an Indigenous population acceptance of oral health within a primary health care organisation. The research focuses on determining key themes within a rural Canadian Cree population which may enhance or impede the concept of "relational continuity of care" in the provision of oral health services to this local community. The qualitative methods are appropriate, and the authors have made clear that the characteristics of the four communities "purposely selected" from the nine identified, allow the generalisation of the findings across the Cree communities within the region. The findings from the study are not unique to the primary health care literature - as the authors note - but they are of importance within the delivery of public dental services to rural, remote and Indigenous communities in North America and internationally. The findings that impermanence of oral health workers and the lack of effective communication skills in the language of the local community are key barriers to perceptions and positive attitudes toward oral health are important policy action points. Similarly, the three themes derived to enable greater community acceptance of oral health services are not unique, but are of relevance to the implementation of appropriate and rationally planned dental services to these communities. Cultural competence of providers, the ability of the dental team to work cooperatively across the primary health area, and the role of local health and community agencies in supporting and encouraging and integrated health and oral health system with the region appear as major enablers to improving access to dental care and promoting oral health. This study shows that high risk Indigenous communities need a special approach to dental service care an delivery. A message applicable internationally.

I believe manuscript may be improved for an international readership in a number of ways.

1. The term - "enablers" rather than "facilitators" may be a more universally acceptable descriptor of factors which promote positive outcomes;
2. The Introduction could include a statement of the context of the specific study focus - "relational continuity of oral health care" to the broader public oral health needs of the specific community - their isolation from urban services, their objective dental needs and how current dental services are prioritised;

3. Some of the quotations within the results could be shortened to coincide with the theme identified, as well as the concluding recommendations;

4. The authors could consider an alternative term to "Organization's concerted efforts" - community engagement, proactive community involvement etc?

5. The Discussion could be summarised more succinctly aligned along the lines suggested by Docherty and Smith B Med J 199; 318:1224-1225; and

6. The comment * "A few interviewed study participants..." could be better worded to illustrate the overlap of participants contribution and also noted in the discussion as a possible weakness.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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

Yes

**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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