Reviewer’s report

Title: An evaluation of a data linkage training workshop for research ethics committees

Version: 1 Date: 28 October 2014

Reviewer: Nayha Sethi

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1) You mention at L214 that one of the workshop sessions recorded a decrease in knowledge/understanding as a result of the workshop. Either this is meant to read ‘increase’ rather than decrease (in which case it should be corrected), or else the decrease should be explicitly accounted for. It is confusing to the reader as it goes against the key findings.

Minor Essential Revisions
2) Stage 4: Delivery of training programme discusses numbers and participants but not content of the workshops apart from brief information included at L127. If one of the key questions of this paper is about whether workshops are effective -then it would make sense to list what topics are covered within the workshops, under this section. For example, did the content seek to deal directly with the discrepancies which were taking place in application approvals as identified in the 2011 study?

3) Footnote 14 - authors need to insert page number for this reference.

4) L208 - referencing error.

5) L68 - need to remove either 'surveyed' or 'selected'.

6) The authors could be more explicit in outlining the problem that they are tending to earlier on in the paper, the clear research questions aren’t explicitly articulated until the discussion section.

Discretionary Revisions
7) L40-41 - Might be useful for the reader to know what some of these discrepancies were and whether and if so, how, the training workshops would tend to such discrepancies.

8) L124 - relating to footnote 9 - authors might want to include the six categories of composition in the body of the text or at least in the footnote.

9) At L55-56 authors mention that training remains ad hoc and mention web-based training programmes but could tell us more about their perceived (in)utility. If the paper is discussing the effectiveness of face to face training, then authors could be a bit more explicit and expand on the limitations of web-based
training.

10) L106-107 - Although the article is describing training in part of Australia, international audiences may also read the article. As such it would be helpful to clarify the roles of ethics/executive officers.

11) In relation to the point directly above, although the article is specific in its description of training offered in Australia, the article needs to speak to the international audience - what could the rest of us take away from the Australian experiences? Are the authors recommending the uptake of face to face workshops all over or do we need more research and country-specific research on whether such training is/would be effective?

12) 170 - were participants asked about whether they had previously received training (not necessarily via attended workshops but via web-based training)?

13) L277 - particular methodologies such as...?

14) What about discrepancies? Is there any way of actually checking whether or not there are still discrepancies across HRECs regarding approval of applications? If so, has the level of discrepancy increased/decreased? I think you touch upon this in the limitations section but it might be expressed more explicitly in relation to HRECs rather than individual participants. Perhaps something to test in future work

15) A general comment - well done to the authors, this is encouraging research on an important area for those interested in HRECs and data linkage

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