Reviewer's report

Title: Ethics reflection groups in primary health care, an evaluation study.

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Reviewer: Anne Slowther

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper looking at an important and relatively under researched area that of clinical ethic support in primary and community care. The robust evaluation of an ethics intervention is also relatively rare. So this paper is to be welcomed.

Major comments

The authors need to have a short section in their introduction describing the primary care context in which this study was set. Ethics reflection groups appeared to take place on wards, implying physical institutions, but not all primary care is delivered in institutions, and in some countries, for example the UK, nursing homes would not be seen as part of primary care but as community care. This is probably splitting hairs but it would be helpful to describe the setting, for example what is a municipality? How many health care departments does it have? What kind of health care establishments are there in 'primary care'? What kind of staff work in them? Are all staff in one health care department based in the same physical location (this might have an effect on who engages with ethics reflection or how it is organised?]

Methods

The justification for having three distinct focus groups for different kinds of stakeholders (participants, facilitators, and managers) needs to be set out. Also how this might affect the data collection for each of the research questions. It seems to me on reading the research questions that they were much more relevant in terms of experience to the participants and facilitators and that the managers would find it more difficult to talk about the ethical challenges that were discussed, and the barriers to participation. Presumably the questions posed to each group differed to elicit answers to the research questions from their particular perspective, so managers' observation of changes in practice or barriers to participation, and participants' experience of changes in practice. I think these different perspectives are a strength of the study but this needs to be made more explicit.

Results (p8 line 178) The example given here to illustrate the theme of patient autonomy as a prominent ethical issue seems unclear. It seems to be more an example of someone suggesting a different approach to care with a motive that it might be better for the patient which may or may not be respecting their autonomy. Other examples in the table, and later in the text make this finding of increased sensitivity to patient autonomy much clearer. I would suggest using a
different example as your first one, or making the autonomy element more explicit.

With the explicit examples in the table, do you have consent to use the case examples?

Discussion. In your section on lessons learned you talk about the difficulty of being a facilitator and the need for training in knowledge and skills,. This seems plausible but was not brought out in your results. Was this a finding from the focus group data? The results focus primarily on impact/experience of participants and on quality of care but not on the experience of facilitators.

Minor comments
Table with examples of cases
The term ‘mentally retarded’ would not be considered acceptable in the UK, and I suspect in some other countries. The person would be described as having a learning disability. The authors should consider

Discretionary revisions
Conclusion
A major finding in your paper was the importance of management support and embedding/anchoring sessions in the routine of daily work. I am surprised you did not include this in your conclusion. This will be a really important message for others seeking to implement similar initiatives

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I am a member of the European Clinical Ethics Network, as is one of the authors