Reviewer's report

Title: What establishes an excellent nurse? A focus group and Delphi Panel approach

Version: 1 Date: 23 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Virginia Plummer

Reviewer's report:

Dear authors,

The first half of the paper is changed significantly however the abstract has not been changed to match. Further, it would be helpful next time if changes are made clear to the reviewers in track changes or in text highlights.

Background - the notions of innovative behaviour, generating new ideas and reaching excellent accomplishments seem vague and distant and the concepts of excellent professional, professional excellence, imply we may be talking about relevance to a mix of disciplines (although the authors refer to nursing as a 'field'). The reader does gain a convincing picture of what the recent literature says on the precise topic for nursing. An 'excellence' nurse is later described as one with outstanding competence, but it could be determined that one is either competent or not. The discussion on honours students is interesting in the clinical context as it is most often considered a research degree.

Purpose - there appears to be a mismatch between the larger study upon which this is drawn, from palliative care and home care, and community care and family care and the mental health care and hospital nurses in the focus groups. It is not clear what is meant by the aim at line 39 page 6. No need to put the length of the focus group discussion time in both the data collection and the recruitment sections.

Method - explain why the two methods were used concurrently and how the data sets merged

Data analysis, - rather than grounded theory, it would be better to say insights were drawn from grounded theory approach.

Sections out of order- Delphi survey should come before data collection
Discussion - an excellent nurse and outstanding health professional are again paralleled, can an entire cohort or workforce be excellent in which no-one is outstanding from the standard which is consistently high?

Further, how can an excellent nurse 'employ an ensemble of particular competencies, when we know that competence is context specific.

The paper struggles to have real application in contemporary nursing and doesn't bring the literature and results together for discussion on implication for practice policy education and research.

**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.

No

**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:

Needs some language corrections before being published
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