Reviewer's report

Title: Rationing is a reality in rural physiotherapy: A qualitative exploration of service level decision-making.

Version: 2
Date: 6 November 2014
Reviewer: Angela Dew

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and on the whole, well written manuscript. The manuscript deals with an important and under-researched area related to the provision of physiotherapy services to people in rural and remote areas. The concept of rationing is well described and the data from the study highlights the impact of rationing on service provision.

Minor essential revisions

1. The introduction needs a better explanation of the differences in Australia between regional, rural and remote settings. The authors state that 90% of the pop lives in urban areas and defines this as cities or towns of more than 1,000 people. This is potentially misleading as 30% is the figure most commonly used for those living outside of major metropolitan areas. The RRMA (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area) classification system is used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics is the most commonly used and allows for distinctions to be made between metropolitan, large and small rural and remote areas. This would be a useful addition to this paper.

2. The manuscript requires careful editing. There are a number of places where full stops at the end of sentences and spaces between words are missing. Some words are repeated twice next to each other (e.g., under Criteria heading in the BACKGROUND on the 7th line "and which intervention interventions to provide....") On the line above this "sufficient enough in themselves...." - one of these words should be deleted. Some plurals are missing (e.g., under METHOD second line of paragraph 2 "Public sector physiotherapist were prioritised...." physiotherapist should be plural. Under RESULTS third paragraph sentence starts with a numeral "19" this should be "Nineteen...."

3. The number and range of participants involved at different levels - surveys of physios, surveys of stakeholders, interviews - is somewhat confusing and a table may make this easier to follow.

4. It would appear that this paper is primarily reporting on the results from the interviews (all the data presented in Tables 5 & 6 are labelled A, B, and D which I believe corresponds with the labels given to interview participants) therefore do we need to know the coding given to survey participants (P, PP, CM, CN)? The survey data is briefly described at the bottom of the first results page but no data is provided. The reader is not clear about what was asked in the survey. No data
is presented from consumers - is this deliberate - it requires comment.

5. At the end of the second page of RESULTS the authors refer to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the issues related to rural physiotherapists' lack of capacity to respond to possible resulting increased demand. International readers will be unfamiliar with the NDIS and its likely impact. This needs explanation perhaps in the introduction.

Discretionary Revisions
1. Table 2 - I am not sure that this table adds anything to the paper and suggest it could be deleted (or its relevance made clearer).

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.