Reviewer's report

Title: Squaring the circle: a priority-setting method for evidence-based service development, reconciling research with multiple stakeholder views

Version: 2 Date: 26 January 2015

Reviewer: Joanna Henderson

Reviewer's report:

The authors have provided a description of an interesting approach to bringing together diverse perspectives and priorities into a common priority setting process. The information provided is helpful and extends the currently limited literature on processes such as these within mental health system change. The revisions suggested below aim primarily to strengthen the method description so as to enable replication of the approach and strengthen the usefulness and applicability of the study. As well, some minor corrections/clarifications are suggested under Minor Essential Revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Abstract: Method – last sentence – word is missing
2. Introduction: Background: First paragraph – use of “agreeing” – perhaps it should be replaced with “setting”
4. References: Review formatting, for e.g., journal names are inconsistently capitalized.
5. Table 5: % decimal places should be consistent across columns
6. Figure 1: It would be helpful to highlight this study as located in Stage 2 and/or label the activities of Stage 2 as has been done for Stages 1 and 3
7. Throughout: IQUESTS vs IQuESTS – both appear

Major Revisions

8. Method: Sample – From where/how were participants for Stage 2 recruited? (The current wording of paragraph one appears to describe recruitment for Stage 1 but not Stage 2).
9. Method: Sample - The authors describe the sample as “diverse”, yet also describe that individuals often identified as belonging to more than one stakeholder group. It would be helpful to have additional information that demonstrates the diversity of the stakeholder group. As well, to what extent did participants ‘represent’ the views of their stakeholder groups/organizations vs their own opinions?
10. Method: Sample - How many Stage 2 participants participated in Stage 1?
How many participated in each modality in Stage 2 (workshop, survey) and how many overlapped? Although the info is available in the results section, it would be helpful for the sample breakdown across methods to be reported in the method section instead.

11. Method: Paragraph 8 – How were the criteria in Table 1 selected? How were participants advised to use these criteria in making in their ratings of ‘individual priorities’?

12. Method: Paragraph 9 – Did all workshop participants vote on all ideas (What was the participation rate at each round?)

13. Discussion: Paragraph 3 – How was the feedback gathered?

14. Limitations – representativeness of the sample should be discussed, as well as biases introduced by some individuals participating at multiple phases (having numerous opportunities to vote) while others only participated in one stage/process

**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.