Reviewer’s report

Title: Impact of referral templates on the quality of referral from primary to secondary care. A cluster randomised trial

Version: 1 Date: 28 March 2015

Reviewer: Ann Dadich

Reviewer’s report:

I would like to congratulate the authors for conducting such a rigorous and well-considered study. Its scope is encompassing yet focused, demonstrating skilful scholarship. As per the reviewer guidelines, the question posed is well defined; the methods are appropriate and well described; the data appear to be sound; the manuscript appears to adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition; the discussion and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported; the methodological limitations are clearly stated; the authors acknowledge their previous research; and the writing style is acceptable.

In the spirit of strengthening this manuscript, the following suggestions are offered for the authors’ consideration.

1. Discretionary Revisions
   Nil.

2. Minor Essential Revisions
   The authors state, ‘The intervention consisted of distribution of referral templates to be used as references when initiating a new referral to medical outpatient clinic for referrals within four specified diagnostic areas’ – to optimise reader clarity, it might be helpful to rephrase this statement.

   For the benefit of those who may wish to further this research, it might be helpful to clarify the reasons why, ‘Two centres initially randomised to the intervention group declined participation’.

   With the section titled, Discussion, it might be helpful to clarify why the following finding was surprising – ‘years of experience in a hospital environment surprisingly does not seem to predict improved referral quality’.

   With the section titled, Conclusion, it would be helpful to consider the implications associated with the research findings for practitioners – notably, health service managers – and policymakers.

3. Major Compulsory Revisions
   As per the reviewer guidelines, the authors may wish to revise the title to accurately convey the research findings.
Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.