Reviewer's report

Title: Why do older people with multi-morbidity require emergency admissions to hospital from the community: a root cause analysis.

Version: 1 Date: 14 April 2015

Reviewer: Anne-Marie Hill

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

Overall
This is a valuable study as it investigates a serious problem within Australian health care systems – namely ED presentations by older people in increasing numbers. The results section needs expansion for the reader to judge the validity of the RCA in this study and to also examine the rigour of the findings.

I think the design while appropriate needs to mention more about the limitations of RCA, and in view of its limitations for examining large numbers of admission in this way, it would be more helpful to discuss future feasible avenues for research as well.

The abstract also requires careful wording appropriate to the type of data generated and the type of study that was completed. The population in this study is not representative of all community dwelling older people or all older people.

Abstract
Need to report that it is for “community dwelling older people” not older people.

The percentages of each category are not appropriate for presenting these type of data as they can give a misleading impression to the reader of the abstract only. Themes must in this sample be somewhat overlapping in some causal sense and thematic analysis presents qualitative data with the attendant limitations.

The conclusion takes the RCA a step too far in my opinion – I don’t think it’s possible to conclude at this point that the thematic analysis can result in classifications. I do think they could assist in designing interventions somewhat, but the most relevant conclusion or next research step is that they could assist in constructing a larger epidemiological cohort study.

Methods
To examine whether the methodology was soundly used in this study the event flow diagram should be presented and at least one example of the cause and effect diagram should be presented.

The thematic analysis needs some amplification as to how it was conducted here, to examine if it was soundly conducted.
Results
My two key comments here are:
At least one cause and effect diagram should be presented. There needs to be presentation of quotes to support the thematic analysis component of the study. Its a RCA that used thematic analysis – hence if this is done well the reader can feel confident about ascribing a root cause to the admission.

Discussion
The examination and discussion of the themes needs to be undertaken in more contexts with the evidence for why older people present to emergency departments. For example, I would expect several of the larger studies about older people and ED presentations (about 30% of visits by older people in US due to injury of which falls are the largest cause). Research describing admissions due to adverse reaction to medications also seems relevant here.

Limitations
A more detailed limitations section is required to address the problem and the sample chosen to examine the problem. Here you have interviewed people without cognitive impairment and those who were able to take part in an interview. As such this is not inclusive of all older people who attend emergency departments.

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