Author’s response to reviews

Title: Establishment of radiation therapy services in North West Tasmania: A community need or election strategy?

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Author’s response to reviews:

Editor-in-Chief, Dr Maria Zalm

BMC Health Services Research

Dear Dr Zalm,

Thank you for your email dated January 24, 2019 suggesting revisions to the manuscript Establishment of radiation therapy services in North West Tasmania: A community need or election strategy?. The reviewer’s comments were very helpful, and all points have been addressed.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Sincerely,

Dr Sancia West RN PhD

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Reviewer reports:

Siddhartha Baxi (Reviewer 1):

1) Suggest replacing "radiation cancer therapy service" with "radiation therapy service" in the abstract. This is consistent with terminology used by RANZCR

RESPONSE: Thank you for noting this. The term has been altered to consistently read as “radiation therapy services”.

2) Within the abstract, in results section please change "concerned about sustainability and safety establishing the service" to "concerned about the sustainability and safety in establishing the service" - I think this reads better if my interpretation is correct.

RESPONSE: Thank you for noting this omission. It has been corrected as per above.

Timothy Showalter (Reviewer 2):

This study applies document analysis, a recognized method of qualitative research, to evaluate a policy decision to establish radiation therapy specialty care in an underserved area of Tasmania. The authors have framed the topic by providing the political context and have used document analysis to give perspective on the decision to establish radiation therapy services in this era.

To this reviewer, the topic and design have less overall impact on health services consideration than upon the political process in that specific nation. In its current form, I do not think that this analysis will have specific health services research impact or relevance, though it certainly would be interesting to citizens and lawmakers in Australia. Some potential alternative study designs that may have advanced this study to a more direct health services research topic would be to: compare the document analytic findings for this issue to other health service actions that were successful and/or were supported by the medical community for this underserved region;
perform a companion analysis that compares the geographic needs for health care versus the
distribution of services (in this case, the document analysis would provide insights into the
mismatch); or include direct stakeholder interviews with health care personnel and politicians on
a number of health service topics--which would establish a disconnect on this issue but not
others, presumably? However, by narrowing in on this one topic without comparison to other
services, districts, or nations, it seems to be mostly focused on the political messaging during
campaigns.

RESPONSE: The authors thank this reviewer for their comments. Upon review of the article, it
is agreed among the authors that the point of the article was never to provide a comparison to
other services, regions or nations. It was a descriptive case study to understand the health policy
outcome that resulted from it and the applicability of a particular policy analysis framework.
Comparison was not considered to be necessary to achieve this purpose but can instead be
achieved by future research that has the specific aim of comparison. Understanding “political
messaging” is of great importance to health service research due to its impact on health policy
development. In order to make these limitations clear to the reader a Limitations section has been
added just prior to the Conclusion, highlighting the restrictions to generalisation of the findings.