Reviewer’s report

Title: 'Holding the line': A qualitative study of the role of evidence in early phase decision making in the reconfiguration of stroke services in London.

Version: 0 Date: 20 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Ruth Boaden

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper that takes a different view of the issues surrounding reconfiguration of stroke services in London, which are being studied by others. It presents a complementary perspective, which adds to knowledge in this area, but does require some changes before it could be published.

I have made some detailed comments on the pdf itself - many of which are asking for justification of some of the statements made in the paper, or for rephrasing of them. I leave these to the authors to decide how to respond to them.

However, in addition there are some more overarching issues that do require attention:

(a) The authors need to explain how this work relates to the Fulop et al work, referenced at several points in the paper. Who funded it? And were the Fulop et al team aware of it? Given that the data was gathered at around the same time from similar people (perhaps even the same - but it may not be possible to be any clearer about this)

(b) Considerably more explanation of the governance structures is needed at some point in the paper. I am a part of the Fulop et al research team and even I struggled to work out who was who, and why they were involved, from the way this paper is written. It might be worth looking at the papers from the Fulop study to see if this has already been summarised in a way that could be referenced.

(c) This leads to the need to justify the selection of interviewees and to show how they contributed to the argument in the paper. For example, there are two 'charity' staff interviewed but no reference at all to 'charity' input to the process anywhere in the paper.

(d) Is the paper focused on 'research' evidence, or about the use of 'evidence' more widely? It is more than research evidence - as the quote on p.9 shows - but this needs to be clearer from the start, and in the abstract etc.

(e) The theoretical arguments made about EBM etc. are not really substantiated by the data presented in the paper. I suggest these are made less important in the overall argument (see
also comments on the paper itself) - which is still convincing even without emphasis on this element.

(f) My comment on p.16 about whether the data here is in the public domain i.e. widely known, is very important and must be addressed.

I hope the authors are able to make these changes and resubmit the paper for further consideration.

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I am a member of another research team studying the same reconfiguration (https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hsdr/10100909/#/) which is referenced in this paper, and from which the argument in this paper is developed
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