**Reviewer’s report**

**Title:** Building Capacity for Medical Education Research in Family Medicine: The Program for Innovation in Medical Education (PIME)

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 03 May 2017

**Reviewer:** Lynn Monrouxe

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This manuscript attempts to evaluate an intervention designed to facilitate first-time researchers' research careers funded by external grants. It uses a mixed-methods approach.

**INTRODUCTION**

In the introduction the authors claim that "MER has also been criticized for ignoring relevant literature and for not placing the research question in a wider conceptual context" - ironically this study failed to even provide the reader with a research question, nor any aims or objectives. Without these it is impossible to see if the research fulfilled that which it was supposed to fulfil.

The authors claim that research in medical education is declining. The evidence they provide does not back this claim up. Furthermore, research in medical education is experiencing a sharp increase. For example, in 2014, over 1,500 manuscripts were submitted to the top international journal Medical Education alone: a 53% increase since 2007. Other medical education journals report a similar increase. Further, around 82,000 medical education-focused articles were published in over 4,000 different journals between the years of 1960 and 2010, with an 8-fold annual increase over time (Kyungjoon, L., et al. 2013).

**EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME SECTION**

This section fails to set the evaluation within any theoretical framework and the reader is left wondering what is to be made of the data resulting from this. Furthermore, no research method has been clarified (no sampling method identified, and no ethical approval was provided - to say "This study was a program evaluation and thus did not require ethical approval" is insufficient - consent forms, anonymity, right to withdraw etc are all required and none of this is explicit.

"Fourteen stakeholders were invited to participate in the evaluation" - by whom? What is the relationship between the interviewer and programme?
Participants are an eclectic group - but analyses undertaken as one. Why? What is the theoretical driver for this?

Interviews were undertaken in-person or via telephone - these are very different ways of interviewing - why? What do these formats do in terms of the interview process?

ANALYSIS

"open coding was performed by hand" - why? This is not an appropriate rigorous way to manage qualitative data.

"After an initial list of codes was developed, the transcripts were coded a second time to group common codes together to form themes. The coding was reviewed several more times to ensure that no new codes emerged. Once the researcher was satisfied the themes reflected recurring patterns in the study and the needs and views of participants, the data were categorized to provide rich, detailed and comprehensive information. Interview participants ensured the interpretation was according to their intentions and perspective." - in here we have the 'god terms' of 'emergence' and 'member-checking' - these concepts have been recently de-bunked and problematised in Medical Education Research: Varpio, L., Ajjawi, R., Monrouxe, L. V., O'Brien, B. C. and Rees, C. E. (2017), Shedding the cobra effect: problematising thematic emergence, triangulation, saturation and member checking. Med Educ, 51: 40-50. doi:10.1111/medu.13124

In addition, I feel that the process of analysis being undertaken by a single researcher ("Once the researcher was satisfied…") is problematic, and that they have done this by hand I cannot see how data were "categorized to provide rich, detailed and comprehensive information" - was this undertaken via scissors and paper exercise?

RESULTS

The section on 'Outputs' comes out of the blue and doesn't seem to fit with any of the research methods outlined in the 'evaluation of the programme' section.

The section on 'Outcomes' attempts to report the 'thematic analysis' but no conceptual themes are presented and excerpts are not tagged to participants' roles in the programme so the reader is left wondering if the programme lead says something that might differ to the recipient of the intervention - and so on - this is very confusing. The section is purely descriptive with no analytical component.
DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

I felt that the final sections were rendered inadequate as they essentially build on an inadequate study.

For this evaluation to have been of any use to the research community it really should have addressed all of the inadequacies highlighted in the introduction and should have been set within a recognizable evaluation framework (e.g. realist evaluation, kirkpatrick's etc).

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