Reviewer’s report

Title: The researchers' role in knowledge translation: a realist evaluation of the development and implementation of diagnostic pathways for cancer in two UK localities

Version: 0 Date: 09 May 2017

Reviewer: Geoffrey Wong

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for asking me to review this manuscript. I am no content expert, though some of what has been described in this manuscript is familiar to me as a clinically active NHS GP. As such, I will restrict my comments to issues related to the application of the realist evaluation approach by the authors.

General comments:

REPORTING - My expectation is that this manuscript is reported using the RAMESES II reporting standards for realist evaluations which were published in June 2016.


Please would the authors review and revise their manuscript having looked through these reporting standards to make sure that each item is reported (or if not relevant / applicable an explanation is provided as to why).

Specific comments:

Line 63:

Realist evaluation is not a method it is an approach in that it is a way of analysing data using the logic of analysis developed by Pawson and Tilley and Pawson (Realistic Evaluation, Pawson R and Tilley N. 1997, London: Sage).

Lines 67 to 68:

Reference is made her to "the intervention".

What intervention do you mean?

The pathway or the implementation process or perhaps the programme theory of the implementation of cancer pathways?
Lines 70 to 71:

Are you suggesting that the two sites were in effect a convenience sample?

Need to justify using such a process as site selection is likely to have an influence on the exact contextual mix and thus possibly the mechanisms that are 'triggered'.

Lines 77 to 78:

Please can you explain why your research question is so narrow - in effect with only an interest in 'what enables?'

There is not necessarily anything wrong in such a narrow focus, but it would be important to understand why you did not think it was important to understand why, or for whom, or to what extent.

Line 88:

Who are these reference groups? A brief explanation of your use of this term would help to orientate readers.

Lines 89 to 93:

Please would you provide more details on how you the analysis of the accounts led to the develop of draft CMOs and the programme theory.

Lines 109 to 118:

My feeling is the process of analysis needs additional explanation and justification.

You appear to have codes based on CMOs and your programme theory. However, the data is then organised into codes.

Why was this done as you already have codes that relate to data that provide you with information on Cs, Ms and Os - in other words a realist explanation of what caused and outcome under what circumstances.

Why did you need to organise the codes into themes?

You could, for example, have used the relevant data from the interviews to confirm, refute or refine aspects of your CMO configurations that are embedded within your programme theory.

When did you do above and beyond compare the themes and CMO configurations?

What do you mean by "consistent" on line 116?
Line 179:

Do you mean mechanisms here in the realist sense or do you mean processes?

Figure 1, line 195:

This figure is informative, but it does not seem to exactly relate to the contents of CMO1 to 5.

In addition, I would urge you to reconsider if all the mechanisms listing in this figure. For example, I could not see from the data you provided, how a simpler health economy (as a context) would 'trigger' easier negotiations (is this really a mechanism) to produce effective implementation.

Overall my feeling is that it may be better to make sure that the contents of Figure 1 exactly matches the text in each CMO and that each part of the CMO is clearly labelled as being a context (C), mechanism (M) or outcome (O).

The reader then does not have to keep looking at the Figure to work out what is functioning as what.

Overall comments on CMO 1 to 5 presented in the 'Results' section:

Along with 'labelling' the CMOs (see comment above), I felt that if you were going to provide data to support your inferences about what was within the CMO configuration, you might want to revisit the data provided. Reading some of these data did not immediately enable me to think 'yes, I can see how this data supports your inferences'.

For example:

- Lines 219 to 226: This appears to be important illustrative data provided to support the inference that strong group identity is a mechanism in CMO1.

However, it does not quite do so for me as the inference that I would come to as being the mechanism would be more a sense of shared purpose.

If this is what you mean by "strong group identity" then fine, but if it is not, it may be worth providing another illustrative section of text.

and...

- Lines 227 to 230: I'm not quite sure this is very convincing. People may be missing or might come and go to the groups, but those that do turn up might still have had a history of working successfully together.
Of course I realise that space is limited in any journal manuscript, but it would probably go a long way towards providing the transparency needed to reassure readers that your inferences are plausible, if you provided more data. As a balance you might consider providing the most pertinent texts in the main manuscript and have additional files with all the detail for each CMO in turn?

Summary of results section: Lines 333 to 358.

In this section it is again unclear that the analysis undertaken used the realist logic of analysis developed by Pawson and Tilley.

The results are more descriptive than explanatory of outcomes and it is also unclear how any of these findings (in the form of CMO configurations or not) fit into the programme theory provided in lines 94 to 97.

No attempt appears to have been made to refine this programme theory.

Strengths and limitations section.

This section may need to be revised once the result section has been revised.

Conclusion section

This section is likely to need revision once the result section has been revised.

For example, the conclusion that ownership is important is interesting, but it is not at present clear in this manuscript how such a claim can be supported by the data.

**Level of interest**

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English**

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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