Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementing without guidelines: Learning at the coalface - A case study of health promoters in an era of community health workers in South Africa

Version: 1 Date: 26 Feb 2020

Reviewer: Jorge Maia Barreto

Reviewer's report:

The article "Implementing without guidelines: Learning at the coalface A case study of health promoters in an era of community health workers in South Africa" presents the results of a qualitative study that examined the context of changing the approach to health promotion in PHC in South Africa, from the case study of the implementation of Community Health Workers in the context in two provinces of the country. The most important thing is that this type of study provides qualitative evidence of high value for understanding barriers, facilitators and other crucial aspects for the implementation of health programs and policies in contexts of evolution and the search for the consolidation of health systems that intend to strengthen the PHC role, given the factors related to the social determination of health, especially in in low-and-middle-income countries. The study shares information and insights that can help other health systems to reflect on their challenges and learn from the experience studied to consider this qualitative evidence in their decision-making processes. Although the contexts are different, the phenomena can always maintain verisimilitude, once their different constitutive elements are shared to some extent. Thus, the study presents, in my view, relevance and good general methodological quality. This article is a resubmission resulting from a first round of review, in which I did not participate, so I can assume that this version has been improved, which facilitated my work of reading and reviewing, while it was possible to identify that the article reached a good level quality, as already mentioned.

However, specifically regarding the need to clarify the methodological aspects of the study, I confess that I missed more details about the data analysis process, especially in the subsection "Data analysis" in which the authors present information about the technical procedures of the analysis (software, aggregation techniques, etc.), but do not mention whether there is an interpretive / descriptive theory / approach behind the results presented. In fact, as this is a primary qualitative study, I think it is even more important to make the research as transparent as possible, including to increase confidence in the results presented.

So, I think it's important to clarify about the qualitative approach (eg ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research, other) and guiding theory, as well as identifying the research paradigm (eg postpositivist, constructivist / interpretivist), if possible.

Other minor issues:

1) Apparently, Table 2 is inserted in a different call than what was indicated in the text (line 265);

2) The Figure 1 has 'poor' quality / graphic definition, I think it could be improved;
3) The STROBE check-list for observational studies is perhaps not the most suitable for reporting qualitative studies, I suggest considering COREQ (https://www.equator-network.org/reporting-guidelines/coreq/) for verification and inclusion as supplementary material (for authors' consideration).

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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