Reviewer’s report

Title: The development and application of audit criteria for assessing knowledge exchange plans in health research grant applications

Version: 1 Date: 22 March 2014

Reviewer: Enola Proctor

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions:
First, the most serious challenge is clarifying what is meant by “knowledge exchange plans.” Thus the paper’s topic needs to be explained, illustrated, and defined in more detail. The phrase “knowledge exchange plans” itself needs to be defined, and the scope of this term explained. This reviewer was unclear about the topic and meaning of the term until the entire paper had been read. The paper employs the term “dissemination plan” later on, raising the questions: are knowledge exchange plans and dissemination plans the same? Or is one a subset of the other? The exact meaning and range of meaning for knowledge exchange plans is especially difficult to grasp because the authors apply this term across so many parts of a grant proposal. Starting with a clear definition of what is meant by knowledge exchange plans will improve the paper greatly.

Related to this definitional challenge is the fact that countries may differ in the meaning and importance of knowledge exchange plans in grant applications. The review of grant applications and examples offered are limited to the UK. That should be stated even more directly in the manuscript. However other countries may emphasize the concept, although different terms and priorities among funding agencies may be reflected across countries. For example, in the US, the recent PCORI grant funds require an explicit dissemination plan. The authors could expand the potential readership and relevance of this paper through a more global approach.

Most of the substance of the paper is in the tables. The paper might well be reorganized, providing more narrative about what “knowledge exchange plans” mean or look like in various sections of a grant application.

Whether in text or in table, this reviewer is concerned that it seems that only one example is provided for each theme. The reader might be helped by providing multiple examples of what the knowledge exchange plans can look like in various sections of grant applications.

Scoring methods are unclear. Details need to be provided. Moreover it is unclear whether the ratings were applied to, and examples are drawn from, successful or unsuccessful proposals. It seems the difference in scores between successful and unsuccessful proposals could reflect validity in the rating system. However it is unclear what the value is of providing examples from unsuccessful proposals.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.