Reviewer’s report

Title: Organizational conditions for quality improvement based on national registry data in Sweden: a qualitative study using the consolidated framework for implementation research

Version: 1 Date: 13 July 2014

Reviewer: Christopher Wise

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MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

1. The methods for collecting and analysing the qualitative data appear to be sound and controlled. However, because there are a relatively small sample of respondents (17), and these respondents represented four separate regions within Sweden, I recommend eliminating documentation of the specific region/site of a respondent when reporting results in an effort to retain as much anonymity as possible for all individual respondents; the specific site, or region, does not add any great value to the results, and I fear there may be some readers who might possibly be able to identify (or attempt to) particular respondents.

With great respect to the challenges of reporting qualitative data, I would like to identify a few areas that could benefit from further clarification or specificity:

2. The first sentence of the RESULTS section begins with, “The respondents chose to talk about…” (p. 9). This could imply that respondents were given a ‘choice’ about what they wished to talk about, rather than responding to a semi-structured interview guide; if that is the case, the methods section needs to be much clearer about this. Otherwise, it may be helpful to simplify this sentence (e.g., “Responses reflected issues within the themes of evidence strength…” – emphasizing the data collected from respondents rather than potentially biased choices among respondents about what they wished to talk about.

3 Page 11, 1st full paragraph: “The directorates perceptions of the relative advantages of using NQRS for QI are consistent.” I am concerned about the words ‘perceptions’; is the ‘perception’ based on direct experience or knowledge? If not, then it does not truly represent adequate qualitative data and should be excluded. It would be helpful to supply the basis for these perceptions and an example of the data on which a directorates base this perception.

4. Page 11, end of 1st full paragraph: “Most notably, politicians are said to prefer the regional comparisons.” Was it the politicians stating this directly, or someone else? If the former, simplify by stating that “Most notably, politicians prefer the…” , otherwise please provide a reference for this statement.
5. Page 14, 1st paragraph: “This illustrates a communication gap between clinical and management levels, which makes successful implementation less likely.” Is there a reference for this declaration that can be used? In some instances, the level of management engagement can interfere with implementation of particular processes. This needs greater clarification, especially since this is a finding reinforced in the conclusion section. Are there any examples of communication gaps reported by respondents making implementation less successful that the authors could report?

6. Page 14, under “Implementation Climate” section: “However, there is no real tension for change, such as…” How was tension assessed? Did the survey include any specific questions regarding tension? There may be several reasons respondents did not directly discuss ‘tension’, including a survey instrument that did not adequately pull responses regarding tension. It would be inappropriate to conclude that tension did not exist unless there were specific comments reporting that data from respondents. Similarly, in this same paragraph “…respondents do not express any concerns about compatibility with other improvement efforts…”; did respondents respond that there were no concerns, or was it merely that there were few comments about compatibility? The former would be reportable data, the latter would require further investigation (the authors could suggest that further investigation of tension and compatibility is warranted because the current findings had limited data on these issues…).

7. Page 16, 1st paragraph: “Although the directorate’s members participate in structures and activities built up around performance data and QI, this kind of leadership engagement is not necessarily perceived as support at the clinical level.” Please see my comments above regarding the potential for limited validity of ‘perceptions’; if there is specific evidence or experiences of respondents that can support reported perceptions, this would be extremely helpful.

8. Page 16, 2nd paragraph: ‘The respondents’ perceptions about available resource for undertakings associated with NQRs are consistent. QI work is one of the clinics’ essential obligations and NQR work and QI are to be carried out within the clinic’s regular budget.” (1) Same regarding ‘perceptions’; (2) When I read this sentence I inferred that there as adequate funding – within the allotted budget – and did not require separate funding efforts; however that inference conflicted with the authors’ writing on page 17 (and reinforced by the authors in the conclusions) that “most respondents agree that the clinics’ resources…are inadequate.” Clarifying the sentence on page 16 may be helpful.

9. Bottom p. 18 to p. 19: “The fact that the respondents gave few statements relating to the process domain is rather telling in itself, and an observation to which we will return.” (the authors return to this on p. 21) Similar to comments offered above, I have concerns about declaring the lack of data on a particular topic/issue as an indication that the topic/issue is of limited concern to the respondents. As the authors appropriately identify, one reason for incomplete data could be that “(2) the CFIR is constructed for studying implementation of more well-defined interventions and does not capture a broader policy process”
I suggest the authors instead consider reporting that, for these particular topics/issues where they did not obtain specific data, more information is required.

Because this is an international journal, I acknowledge that some of my reviewer comments may derive from the particular inflections and syntax of my country (United States). I support the editor and authors in taking that into consideration in subsequent revisions.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

1. It may be helpful to offer the semi-structured interview guide to readers if possible.

2. Is there anything that should be reported regarding potential respondents who refuse to participate? For example, how many individuals refused, and was there any assessment of those who refused compared to participating respondents to assure there was no unintentional selection bias?

In the methods section the authors report that the survey was initially structured to reflect all five domains of the CFIR. However, under the ‘Analysis Procedure’ section it is then reported that, “The final analysis, however, was constructed of three of the domains”. It would be helpful to provide the reason(s) why two domains were excluded from the final analysis.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.