Reviewer's report

Title: Calculating implementation costs using a structured method: implementation of a short stay programme for breast cancer surgery

Version: 1
Date: 2 February 2015
Reviewer: Michael Maciosek

Reviewer's report:

The paper provides an estimate of the costs of implementing a short-stay (less than 24 hours) surgery program in a multi-center setting and reports the variations in implementation activities and costs among the centers. This is difficult article to write because the implied research question is simply “how much did it cost?”. Reporting of these estimates is important, but it is difficult to generate interest in a descriptive paper. This report tries to expand beyond the descriptive with a focus on methods in the title, the abstract and the text. This approach seems unfruitful because there are not substantial new methods to report. The estimates themselves are useful to others who may be contemplating a similar program. The authors assist such an audience be providing hours in addition to costs so that others may attach their own estimates of cost per hour.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. I suggest that the authors change the paper to a simple descriptive paper by cutting back on the methods-related text in the body and discussion and adding discussion on how the estimates may be useful to the planning activities of others who are contemplating similar activities, such as in different surgical areas or with a focus other than length of stay. Discussion of how the estimates differ from other available implementation costs available might also assist readers who would use these estimates. I imagine that such a revision would result in a shorter paper (perhaps a brief report) that would be just as valuable as the current version. The proposed approach is illustrated by suggested changes below.

Discretionary Revisions

Suggestions for a less methods-focused abstract:
3. Background section. Delete second sentence starting with “More transparency..”
4. Discussion section. Delete first sentence (“We provide…”)

Suggestions for text shortening:
5. Line 13: delete sentence starting with “A structured and standardized…”. 
7. Line 90: delete sentences starting with “Implementation costs...”, “Overall cumulative...”, and “All analysis...”. With respect to the last sentence, it is unimportant which statistical package is used for a descriptive study.
8. Lines 154-162: delete sentences that repeat methods and start discussion section with the sentence “This study showed...”.
9. Lines 166-173: delete this paragraph that repeats methods in the discussion section.
10. Line 176: delete sentence starting with “In this study, ...”.
11. Lines 210-218: delete speculative methods-related text starting with “Costs which may have...” through end of paragraph.
12. Line 220-238 delete future research section. Consider deleting paragraph starting on line 239 or adjoin with previous section on limitations.

Suggested text revisions for reorganization or clarity:
13. Please report if providers were compelled to or volunteered to complete the scoring sheets, and whether or not this had challenges to overcome and what the completion percent was.
14. Lines 48, 57, etc. The authors use the phrases ‘scoring form’ (line 48), “activities scored” (line 57), etc. as they relate to time logs. As I understand it these were simply time logs with no aspect of ranking or grading activities as might be inferred by a reader from the term ‘score’. Why not just call them time logs? If there was more to the activity, please add text to explain.
15. Line 96. Study population subsection seems like it should be part of methods rather than results.
16. Line 105. Similarly, the description of the intervention would typically part of the background not results. In the case of this study, it seems the specifics of the intervention were determined at each site and the details were discerned from the time logs. If that is the case, it would help to replace the current introductory sentence at line 105 with something like “The score sheets revealed seven major activities within three categories of developmental, execution and combined developmental/execution costs.” Otherwise, I recommend also moving this subsection (Implementation activities) to the background section.
17. Lines 180-185. Consider moving the comparison of uptake and costs from the discussion section to the results section and introduce it in the methods as an unplanned post-hoc comparison (if that is accurate).
18. Add discussion of usefulness of these estimates to others planning implementation of similar programs.
19. Add discussion of how well these reflect true net implementation costs. That is, consider whether it is at least moderately likely that these implementation activities replaced some maintenance activities of the old way of scheduling surgeries and thus the implementation costs overstate net costs, or whether that is unlikely and hence the presented estimates are reasonable estimates of net...
costs.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance 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'