Reviewer’s report

Title: How do stakeholders from multiple hierarchical levels of a large provincial health system define engagement? A qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 08 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Helen Brooks

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript for Implementation Science, which was interesting and well written. However, I cannot recommend publication in the current format and have made the following suggestions for revisions:

Introduction

The introduction would benefit from a more thorough grounding of the study in implementation science literature. I thought some introduction of similar concepts from other areas raised in the manuscript would be beneficial (e.g. participation, involvement).

Page 4, Line 18. Give an example of the indirect interpretations of engagement within the characteristics of individuals and outer setting domains.

Methods

More information is required on the methods utilised including:

* On what characteristics were the SCNs purposively sampled?
* Page 4, line 3 - reference companion paper.
* Where were interviews conducted and by whom?
* How was saturation agreed upon and by whom?
* Page 6, line 8-11. Could you clarify that snowballing sampling supplemented the participants identified through membership lists or whether participants were only recruited through the membership lists with a snowballing approach. I didn't think it is currently clear.

* Please provide a reflexive statement detailing the researchers' roles and theoretical positions including any pre-existing relationships with participants.

* How did the researchers deal with any deviant cases in the data?

It might be helpful for the authors to revisit the manuscript using a recognised checklist for the reporting of qualitative data (e.g. consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ)).

Results

I would recommend more development of the themes included in the manuscript as I felt the current presentation was unclear. Are the four themes presented components of engagement which the discussion indicates? If so, how does a theme titled 'interactions' fit as a component? From the data presented, it seems something like 'meaningful interaction and dialogue' might be a more appropriate heading for the theme. The presentation of the themes in the first paragraph of the discussion is much more informative.

Could you also clarify whether participants were talking about 'ideal' or 'actual' engagement within their narratives and whether there were any differences in conceptualisations between stakeholder groups?

I thought some of the themes read more as pre-requisites to engagement rather than defining what engagement was (which was the stated aim of the study).

Additional minor comments:

* I'm not sure you need to include the number of transcription pages within the manuscript.

* Page 8, line 10. Move 1. Participants to a new line.

* Page 10, line 9. Should this be 'shared' purpose?
The addition of further quotes to support the themes raised within the manuscript would be helpful for the reader (e.g. page 11, line 4).

Page 10, line 10. This did not read as a ‘theme’.

Page 11, line 3: I wasn't clear how this separate to theme 4?

Discussion

The manuscript would benefit from introducing some of the literature referred to within the introduction of the manuscript. The authors refer to a model of engagement, could a pictorial representation of the model be included with the manuscript? There are some findings discussed that were not raised in the results.

I hope these suggestions are helpful and I wish the authors well with the manuscript and future research.

**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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