Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Dorie Apollonio

Reviewer's report:
This is an interesting paper that left me with a number of unanswered questions.

Introduction
Generally, I think that there is some confusion in terms given that the authors state that they are looking at definitions of engagement but seem also to be interested (maybe exclusively interested) in how the term is operationalized.
It is unclear what theoretical framework anchors the study and why. The introduction proposes one (CFIR) the results another (IAP2) and the discussion a third (Theoretical Domains Framework.) There really needs to be one organizing concept for the paper followed by an explanation of how the results either provide further support for it, clarify its usage, or undermine it. If others are needed, they should be brought up in the introduced rather than popping up later.

Methods
This paper is drawn from a larger study, which is not described. There is a lot of information missing that I would have expected to find; I'd suggest the authors use the SRQR checklist and ensure that they have included all of the elements suggested for this type of research. The response rate was unclear given the description of the population and the sample; this should be explicit. Some of what is included in methods (e.g. top of page 6) belongs in results/discussion. The description of the coding is somewhat vague; for example, it's not clear how many coders were involved, how many completed initial coding and how many reviewed the codes, what the specific codes were, or what minimum unit of text was chosen. Etc.
Results
While the characteristics of the respondents are provided in a table, they are not summarized in the text nor is there a description of why this information was relevant. Throughout the results section, there is a lack of clarity due to the reliance on words like "often" "extensively" "several" "many" and "frequently." If the claim is that the share of respondents that make a particular claim is (substantively or statistically) significant, it is more compelling to provide actual numbers or percentages. The results section has a number of subheadings; it would be helpful to provide a table indicating how these are organized and their relevance to the theory that guides the paper (separate from the table with sample quotes.) Given that a table of potentially relevant participant characteristics was included, I also expected to see subgroup analyses reflecting these categories, but did not.

Discussion
As noted above, the discussion introduces new material that would be more appropriate in the introduction. The ideas presented in the discussion are intriguing but due to the lack of an (obvious) theoretical framework for the paper, come off as scattershot. The effort to grapple with generalizability concerns in the limitations is not convincing. The first sentence of the conclusions is excellent, however the final sentence does not provide a strong finish.

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