Reviewer’s report

Title: Health professionals' perceptions about their clinical performance and the influence of audit and feedback on their intentions to improve practice: a theory-based study in Dutch intensive care units

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Reviewer: Bernadette Brown

Reviewer’s report:

This is a clear and well-written report of a theory-based laboratory experiment to investigate intensive care health professionals' perceptions about their clinical performance and the influence of feedback on their intentions to change clinical practice. Participants were recruited from 21 intensive care units prior to their enrolment in a cluster randomised controlled trial of an audit and feedback intervention to increase performance on four newly developed pain management indicators. Results showed that intensive care health professionals substantially over-estimated both their own clinical performance and that of their peers. Intention to improve performance was significantly increased through the provision of feedback and the main reason reported for developing new intentions was a lower than expected performance score. An interesting finding is that changes were attributed particularly to personal performance scores rather than the median or top 10% peer performance benchmarks. This questions the utility of including such performance benchmarks within the audit and feedback dashboard developed for this group. The finding that professionals developed new insights about their own performance, but less so about appropriate performance targets suggests a need to further understand how clinicians can be supported to identify appropriate targets so as to be able to prioritise quality improvement efforts. Of significance, the authors note that given the great presence of health professionals' intentions to improve the care they provide, the limited effectiveness often found in audit and feedback studies is likely the result of barriers to translating intentions into actual change in clinical practice and that future research should focus on overcoming those barriers rather than convincing professionals to improve practice. If and how these insights were/will be used to augment the design and delivery of the audit and feedback intervention in the cluster randomised controlled trial involving this same group of intensive care professionals would be a useful addition to the discussion.

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