Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating the implementation of the PACE Steps to Success Programme in long-term care facilities in seven countries according to the RE-AIM framework

Version: 1 Date: 18 Aug 2019

Reviewer: Matthias Hoben

Reviewer's report:

I want to thank the authors for comprehensively addressing most of my concerns. However some concerns are still left, which I think need to be addressed before publication:

1. Authors' response to my comment #2 (the authors not reporting effect sizes of the intervention). While I understand that the authors do not want to risk a rejection of their main paper in which they report intervention effectiveness, my concerns remain that a process evaluation is of limited value if the intervention effectiveness is unknown. I think it is important to know whether the study was effective or not, whether there was a small or big effect size and to what extent implementation processes (as actually evaluated in this study) contributed to the intervention success (or lack thereof). A process evaluation without knowing the outcomes of the process evaluated is of very limited use. For example, while the authors removed the initial statement about the small study effect, they still refer to intervention and implementation effects that are closely interwoven throughout the manuscript. How these two are interwoven exactly can only be assessed and understood if both types of outcomes are known - process and intervention outcomes.

2. Authors' response to my comment #7 (focus on attendance rates only without taking into account WHO participated). The fact that this could not be assessed needs to be stated in the limitations section and the authors need to discuss how over-representation of certain groups and under-representation of others may have affected the implementation process and intervention success. For example, if only care aides attended and no nurses, this may have implications for the more technical/medical aspects of care provision and if care aides were under-represented, important aspects of social care (and intimate knowledge of residents as only held by care aides) may not have been taken into account.

3. Authors' response to my comment #8 (attendance over time rather than overall attendance only). I suggest that the authors either add the appendix they suggested or at least discuss how heterogeneous attendance was over time and how this may have affected implementation and intervention success.

4. Authors' response to my comment #9 (consistency of attendance - same people over time or new ones all the time). I respectfully disagree with the authors' statements. First, while sessions may be attended independently and having attended a previous session may not have been a prerequisite to understand this current session's content, it is highly likely that attending two or more of these sessions exposes participants to a higher dose of the intervention, which may
increase intervention success. Also, we know quite well that care staff do not very often and not very effectively pass on their learnings from training sessions to other staff members. This is certainly not a good argument for not assessing consistency of attendance over time. At the very least this issue should be discussed.

**Level of interest**

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English**

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests**

Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments
which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal