Reviewer's report

Title: Alpha test results for a Housing First eLearning strategy: the value of multiple qualitative methods for intervention design

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Reviewer: Juliana Diniz

Reviewer's report:

In the manuscript entitled "Alpha test results for a Housing First eLearning strategy: the value of multiple qualitative methods for intervention design" the authors describe the initial stage of a testing procedure for a new eLearning strategy.

Strengths

This study can be regarded as a feasibility trial and, therefore, is adequate for this journal. The manuscript is well written and requires no language revision. The Housing First proposal is exceptionally well planned and of interest to a broad audience. In this specific manuscript, authors address the specific issue of resistance to harm reduction, which is a timely contribution to the field.

Weaknesses and issues

Major issue

Authors advocate that because such an early stage procedure is rarely described in detail, it is of high interest for the researchers in the field to have access to their results. However, I wonder if it makes sense to describe initial results from alpha testing in a separate manuscript. As alpha results provide guidance for the planning of beta testing, wouldn't it be more logical to publish alpha testing results at the same manuscript as beta testing results?

Authors should describe how this manuscript differs from the original published protocol and why the current results shouldn't be published later with beta stage results.

It is also unclear how alpha testing was superior to beta testing and if it is really a necessary step prior to larger scale beta testing.

Minor issues

The link on page 3 line 56 is not working properly because de ending parentheses was included as part of the web address.

In methods, authors should explain why the chosen sample size was set at 10 individuals. As well, authors should describe what percentage of the total number of centers that could be reached for the alpha testing represents the 5 centers chosen.

For such a small sample size and considering the objective of the alpha testing, it seems odd to use means and standard deviations. Why did the authors not simply use the raw results from the 10 individuals?

In the discussion, authors state that "Alpha testing also helped us identify and fix a number of problems with the modules that would have been more difficult to deal with had they not been noticed until the subsequent pilot" but do not prove their point. Why would it be more difficult to deal with during beta testing?

The later statement also seems to contradict a prior statement that "Despite identified problems, we decided to keep the CoP and digital badges for the subsequent pilot, as we did not feel the findings warranted their removal based on the small alpha test sample size." If alpha testing sample size was not sufficient to justify significant modifications in the protocol why should we alpha test before beta testing?

Authors declare no conflicts of interest. Are the authors not related to the Housing First Initiative? If so, it should be described as a non-financial conflict of interest.
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