

Reviewer's report

Title: QUERI and the economics of implementation studies

Version: 1 **Date:** 2 February 2007

Reviewer: Martin Eccles

Reviewer's report:

General

These are combined comments from series Editors Martin Eccles and Ian Graham.

This is an interesting article that tackles an important topic.

We are sorry for the delay in getting back to you but, in order to deal with the series of articles as a whole the pace has been dictated by the getting the last reviews of the series.

General comments for authors of all articles

1] Please remember that you are writing for an international audience. In some cases it seems the papers make comments that seem directed at the VHA and these should be deleted - you need to be thinking much more globally and presenting lessons learned and perhaps recommendations for how best to do implementation research regardless of what your own system is like. The DETAIL of VHA structures and funding are of no interest to an international audience. If you wish to make reference to funding it should only appear in the acknowledgements section and not in the body of the text.

2] Related to [1], all articles have a plethora of abbreviations, many of which relate to VHA specific structures functions or procedures. In general these should be described in generic terms and the number of abbreviations kept to a minimum.

3] You need to be clear about who will be the main audience for both these and the rest of the papers- if it is seasoned implementation researchers then sometimes the information seems rather simplistic; if it novel implementation researchers/facilitators then sometimes more clarity is needed- either way the papers need a more similar pitch to the intended audience. We think that the readership is the interested implementation researcher or policy maker.

4] You should use a standard description of the QUERI process both in the text and Table. However, the Journal web system will not retain the formatting so I will send you the preferred version as a separate email attachment. Ideally, this should be introduced early on in the article and then referred to as appropriate throughout.

Overall could you ensure that the article conforms to the journal style as specified in the instructions for authors (<http://www.implementationscience.com/info/instructions/default.asp>).

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Somewhere, early on in the background you need to locate the paper within QUERI, Could you use this standard description (using the same terms (stages and phases etc) see above) and then locate what you subsequently write within this framework. This will also involve shortening or removing the description of QUERI on pp 11-12.

The reviewers and at least one of the editors had some problems working out the intended/best focus for the paper. Is the paper (or should it be) more in the style of a descriptive study (e.g. a case study) or an essay (review of the state of the art/science) or is it presenting a framework for economic analysis? As judged by the referees' comments, framed as either an essay or a general framework it would need considerable re-writing. If you write it as a case-study (economic evaluation is important in implementation; here is what has been done to date; here is what the VA does and why; here are the strengths and weaknesses of the VA approach and a number of alternative methods) then many of the issues about alternate methods of economic evaluation become things that can be mentioned in the discussion as you critique the pro's and con's of the VA approach.

One of the referees suggests that the work could be better referenced. The JAMA reference below is a surprising omission; the book chapter perhaps less surprising as chapters are harder to find; nonetheless it speaks directly to the topic of the paper.

Mason J, Freemantle N, Nazareth I, Eccles M, Haines A, Drummond M and the Evidence-based OutReach (EBOR) Trialists. The economics of influencing the behaviour of health professionals: findings of the EBOR

trial. Journal of the American Medical Association 2001;286:2988-2992.

Severens JL, Martens JD, Wensing M. Economic evaluations of implementation strategies. In: Eds Grol R, Wensing M, Eccles M (Eds). Improving Patient Care: Implementing change in clinical practice. Oxford, Elsevier, 2004.

A better alignment of the paper with the VA/QUERI steps will help contextualize the role of economics in the QUERI framework- e.g. p5 1st heading (CEA) is related to step 2- best practice and the 2nd heading (BCA) about step 3- developing the intervention - I am not sure I buy why the BCA should not consider costs to the patient and quality of life. And what about health outcomes improved by the implementation of best practice- shouldn't that also be figured into this (see the Mason ref above). Longer term thinking about implementation needs to occur (by my paying for the implementation of cancer screening – the care providers in the health service will benefit from more early stage disease discovery and this will save \$ on care in the long run).

On p9 the text says “A fundamental difference between the two methods lies in their perspectives. BCA takes the provider’s perspective and therefore counts only those costs incurred by the provider. CEA follows a societal perspective that values costs borne by the provider, the patient (including informal and formal caregiving at home), insurers and other payers.” I don’t think this section is accurate and is certainly not the view offered by standard UK texts. It is possible to constrain a CEA to a “service” (i.e. provider) perspective. Similarly, with the time horizon, it is possible to choose a variety of time horizons and a lifetime time horizon is not an automatic attribute of a CEA.

It would be helpful to give more detailed examples from the tides study rather than referencing a relatively inaccessible set of published abstracts that the reader will find difficult to get at. More detail would again illuminate the HIV example.

P14- “There is little point developing an implementation program for a best-practice intervention that is only marginally cost-effective”- is this not a value judgement? Depends on whose perspective you have- there is all sorts of money spent currently on practices that are not cost-effective- even harmful- wouldn't it be better to spend that money on ones that are marginally cost-effective than not at all? I would like you to explain this more.

The discussion is more of a re-statement of the body of the text. It doesn't discuss the pro's and cons of the methods discussed and could usefully address these issues.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.