

**Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** Economics of implementation: a case study of QUERI

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**Author's response to reviews:** see over



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Martin Eccles, Ph.D.  
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Dear Dr. Eccles:

I would like to resubmit the manuscript "Economics of implementation: a case study of QUERI" for publication in Implementation Science.

My coauthor and I appreciate the editorial comments on the previous version. We have made every attempt to refashion the manuscript according to the plan they suggested. Below we lay out in detail how this was done. If you have additional comments, please let us know.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark W. Smith

## Responses to comments by the editors and reviewers.

Abstract, p8,9,20 - It is not clear precisely what you mean by "Implementation science appears to have solid qualitative theory but has not reached maturity in quantitative research" ? Theory is largely not about method or is above methods. Do you mean theory derived from qualitative data as opposed to quantitative data? Could you either elaborate, clarify or delete?

We have deleted the statement. Here is the new results section:

Economic evaluation is a key element of implementation research. QUERI has contributed many developments in the theory of implementation but has only recently begun multi-site implementation trials. These trials are unusual in their emphasis on developing detailed costs of dissemination and in the use of business case analyses (budget impact analyses).

p9- 1st para- the discussion of barriers and facilitators is inadequately referenced and the somewhat sweeping generalizations are inappropriate - we are not aware that most such studies have not come from the VA QUERI. Therefore you need to either modify the text and if they have then there is an onus on you to prove it by citing the breadth of the field and identifying the pre-eminent role of VA QUERI studies.

We have added five references and significantly refashioned the paragraph:

Qualitative studies abound in implementation research. A common approach is to discuss factors affecting the success of an implementation program ("barriers and facilitators") and to distill "lessons learned" for later projects [20-25]. Although they lack economic analyses, some point to the role financing can play as a facilitator [21, 22].

p9- 2nd para - this links to the comment above - the issue about IS having solid qualitative theories and not reaching a state of maturity in quantitative research - this needs to be dealt with as suggested above.  
-sentence about unofficial guidelines proliferating and not followed - could you provide a reference for this?

We have deleted that statement.

- 'Qualitative studies of implementation, whether ex post or ex ante, appear to be rare outside of the QUERI program'- we find this a surprising generalisation and it is not one that we agree with. This sentence either needs to be robustly justified or deleted.

We have deleted that statement.

p12- line 4- ... 'time spent on translation prior to kick-off' - you need to define what you mean by 'translation' as it is not really self-evident. We think you mean preliminary work to gain acceptance by host site to engage in the intervention but are not sure.

Your surmise was correct. We have clarified the sentence as follows:

In particular, researchers documented the effort needed to disseminate earlier findings to leaders at seven VA sites in an effort to win approval to carry out the collaborative-care intervention.

p15- 'could in turn could guide'- delete 2nd could

The second 'could' has been deleted.

p19 - ' yet we believe that a printed guideline would raise the quality of VA and non VA implementation research alike' - does this mean a published guideline on how to undertake implementation economic analysis? If so, this is at odds with the evidence of the effectiveness of the distribution of printed materials. If this is what you were meaning then it needs to be edited to reflect the evidence. If this is not what you were meaning to imply then this needs clarification. Are you suggesting that the world needs credible guidance for how to do economic analysis; or there is a need to convince managers to use implementation economic analyses; or economists need to do economic analyses?

The editor's point is well taken; not everyone will follow guidelines. Below we show the deleted sentence (struck through) and its replacement (underlined). There are no citations because we believe the point draws on a common experience of most journal readers.

A third is the lack of expert-panel recommendations for implementation research economics. There are many resources for planning a cost-effectiveness analysis of clinical interventions but relatively few for the cost and cost-effectiveness of implementation interventions. ~~The principles of measuring cost and effectiveness are the same, and yet we believe that a printed guideline would raise the quality of VA and non VA implementation research alike.~~ Expert recommendations will not be followed by all researchers, of course, but without them there is little basis beyond personal experience for proposing cost analyses or for reviewing proposals on behalf of funding agencies.