

Reviewer's report

Title: Overview of QUERI Theme Issue

Version: 2 Date: 23 January 2007

Reviewer: Martin Eccles

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

There are three initial articles that potentially offer the reader a lead in to the QUERI Article Series. These are: [1] the overview (Stetler et al), [2] the QUERI Frameworks (Mittman et al) and [3] the QUERI service directed project template.

General comments

1] We know that there are commonalities and overlaps between some of the content of these articles; they may end up as one article, two articles or remain as three. However, what is important is that they form a clear and coherent, non-repetitive "lead in" to the series of articles that will follow. Given that there is repetition across the three some of our comments are inevitably repetitious too. Hopefully your resolving this will remove the problem.

2] There are three things that need to be clear.

Firstly, the articles need to say why the QUERI initiative came into being and what the QUERI process is.

Secondly, it needs to highlight the fact that the QUERI process is about research into QI.

Thirdly it has to offer a coherent view of the melding of the various "frameworks" that are mentioned in (particularly) papers 2 & 3. At the moment these appear to be more or less joined up but when and how they would be used, by whom and to what end is not clear to the non-VA reader. Nor is it clear whether one has superseded another or whether the content of paper 3 is a more detailed representation of some of the content of paper 2 intended for a different audience at a different point in the process.

3] We don't plan to use the term "QUERI Theme Issue" – rather, we intend that the enterprise is titled the "QUERI Article Series" and that this appears as the start of the title of each article (if we were being ambitious we could try numbering them) – rather along the lines of the JAMA "How to read/use" article series which appeared largely individually over time. This approach will facilitate their subsequent bundling for use by the authors whilst freeing from the vagaries of sequence and scheduling and from overwhelming readers with too much of one topic.

4] 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.

5] Related to [4], 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.

6] 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.

7] In a number of the articles it is not entirely clear where the authors think they are in the overall process from producing scientific evidence to the routinising of such evidence within clinical care. According to the overall description of QUERI you are involved in an incremental scientific process – not an end point attempt to implement a change. The general frame of writing should reflect this throughout the manuscripts.

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

Specific comments

[1] Stetler overview

The somewhat piecemeal quotation of various definitions is not really helpful. As described in the general comments there needs to be a summary/overview of the lead up to the QUERI programme and the six steps. We know that you have reported this previously but without it the reader is given no clear understanding of the context in which they are being asked to think.

Whilst it is helpful to describe the types of articles that will follow we don't think that describing the individual articles in the text and tables helpful (though the list was a valuable tool in scoping the series and informing the authors). We are suggesting sometimes considerable changes and articles may be different from their current content. We think that you can describe in principle what types of articles will follow (case studies, methodology) but you should not cite individual articles. If you wish to work through them one by one I think this should be done at the end when we know precisely what is published and should thus be a rounding off piece rather than a lead in piece.

This paper could also present the information to allow the reader to better understand the VHA context by describing the links between the VA health delivery system, QUERI (the researchers), and the VA funders of the research and health services.

This first paper/papers are also where you could consider saying something on the magnitude of QUERI projects- e.g. phase 4 is nation wide which includes how many centre, settings, providers, patients, etc?

[2] The QUERI Frameworks (Mittman et al)

In terms of telling the reader about the guts of QUERI this may be much of what is needed, though the relationship between the research and development pipeline (the labelling of the two figures has not come through on the pdf file that I have), the expanded QUERI six-step process model and the four-phase implementation research scheme needs to be made both as explicit and simple as possible. It should be concordant with the standard text and table that all other series authors will be using.

Both this and the next paper talk in terms of "presenting the background and motivation for the frameworks, their conceptual and empirical foundations and origins in prior work, their relationships to existing frameworks, and evidence of their value and use in QUERI implementation studies." The text as currently written does not do this – it merely presents the content of the various frameworks. There are four sections to what you propose –

- 1] background and motivation for the frameworks,
- 2] their conceptual and empirical foundations and origins in prior work
- 3] their relationships to existing frameworks
- 4] evidence of their value

[1] should be covered as part of the block of information that readers need to understand subsequent articles as suggested under the general comments above.

[2] is not covered but if you wish to do this it should form a section separate from the presentation of the frameworks themselves; it might even form a separate paper.

[3] is not covered but a suggestion of how to briefly deal with it is made under comments on the third paper below.

[4] is not covered. I am not sure what you would include here but if you have any data from formal or informal evaluation then they should be potentially included.

Additional more detailed comments from the editors.

I personally don't like the pipeline analogy- it promotes the notion that implementation is linear, unidirectional, and focused in a forward direction and sends the message that implementation is insulated from external factors by the barrier that makes up the pipe's shell

You could usefully include some discussion of what constitutes 'suitable' for application (p3) - what are the criteria used to determine the tipping point at which there is sufficient evidence to implement?

Is there any way to create one figure that integrates the 6 steps and 4 phases to visually present the big picture?

It seems odd to me that there is not more discussion about adapting the evidence (CPGs) to the local context as part of identifying best practice- do they simply use the guidelines as they are with out assessing quality and clinical utility and applicability?

Step 4- more info on adapting and developing an implementation intervention would be helpful if you can do this- knowing how you approach this would be of considerable interest to readers. You may feel this is best addressed in subsequent articles.

Step 5- document best practices and improved outcomes – you should make clear that the VHA informatics system that connects their system facilitates this (many places outside the VHA do not have such a system)

Why is there not step 7- sustainability issues?

Is it possible to build a Table that lists the 6 steps and then rows and the columns distinguish the activity- e.g. one column is about implementation activities, another about the research activity for each step and another indicating the amount of research engagement/role—something like below although I have not thought through the details- there should be a way to help parse the implementation activities from the research ones and highlight the role of the implementation researchers – I think this would be particularly

helpful given the action oriented nature of the QUERI.

I don't have the label for the pipeline figures so cant' judge their usefulness

[3] Guidelines for the evaluation of implementation programs: The QUERI Service-Directed Project template. Brian S. Mittman

The paper describes the QUERI template. It is not completely clear how the template is used. It reads as a structured document that must be completed by QUERI investigators as the process of application to initiate a project – i.e. prior to starting a project rather than as an evaluation template at the end of a project. Therefore its purpose should be clarified. This should then also be reflected in the title.

It offers a useful framework - both as a lead in article for the rest of the QUERI Article Series and for others thinking about this area.

I think it should be introduced and discussed slightly differently. It does not really offer the same sort of framework as, for instance, CONSORT, which is about reporting of studies. I suggest it is introduced by saying why it was developed and what its intended purpose was/is. It would also be useful to reference (and possibly summarise in a box or attached file) the QUERI process. It would also be useful to place it in the broader framework of other such related frameworks – in the absence of Ian Graham's review I would suggest you cite another recent overview of the area such as Grol R, Wensing M. Effective implementation: a model. In Eds. Grol R, Wensing M, Eccles M. Improving patient care. The implementation of change in clinical practice. Elsevier 2005.

In the discussion I suggest you include any data from formal or informal evaluation, any plans for further development and your overall conclusions.

Need to reference CONSORT and what is TREND?

I am inclined to want to create a table that list the elements of the template and then divide it up into planning issues; implementation issues; and research (monitoring/evaluation) issues to help the novice see what needs to be implemented and what needs to be studied- e.g. 4) methods mixes these together. I guess this is the way the VA uses the document so it may not be reasonable to ask for a reworded table but from my experience mentoring people trying to implement guidelines- they need to understand what has to be done to implement and what needs to be evaluated/measured and these are conceptually quite distinct even if they are interrelated concurrent sometimes.

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 of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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