

Reviewer's report

Title: Innovations in mental health services implementation: A report on state-level data from the National Evidence-Based Practices Project

Version: 1 **Date:** 16 December 2005

Reviewer: Paula Michelle Whitty

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an important topic, as the author is right to highlight the relative paucity of implementation research in mental health. There is a potentially very useful output of this paper: a description and categorisation of state-level implementation strategies/activities, also pertinent to non-mental health areas and other countries' health systems. However, this useful output is currently lost in a complex description of 'innovations' which, in my view, arises from the author's over-interpretation of the Greenhalgh et al's definition of 'innovation'. We also have no sense of whether these various strategies/activities have been or are likely to be effective (although less important if we view the output simply as a list for further exploration). The qualitative methods used are also inadequately described, and how far this affects the validity of the conclusions drawn needs comment by a qualitative reviewer.

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

1. In my view, the 'innovations' within this study that fit with the Greenhalgh et al definition (full report on www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk is easier to view than ref 17 in this paper), are the EBPs (Assertive Community Treatment etc). The 'innovations' identified by the author are all more appropriately described as the implementation strategies and/or activities (rightly sub-divided as 'pre-implementation', 'initial implementation' and 'plans for sustainability') put in place at state-level to support implementation of the innovation. To sub-divide every possible step along the way to implementing an innovation as an innovation itself, even if 'novel' in some way, introduces an unnecessary and unhelpful level of complexity. In my view, this paper should be re-written as an exploration of state-level implementation strategies/activities (ie an exploration of the fifth key area in the Greenhalgh et al report: 'The outer (extra organisational) context....').

2. Subject to further comments from a qualitative reviewer, in my view the qualitative methods used are inadequately described. Specifically:

- There is too much reliance on an unpublished paper for the methods.
- No information is provided on the number of interviews undertaken in total and in individual sites.
- It is not clear how many of the interviews are one-to-one or group interviews.
- Only in the discussion is the timing of the interviews related to the timescale for the implementation of the EBPs.
- The methods for content analysis are not fully clear, although it appears that this was undertaken on already summarised site visit reports rather than original transcripts (which would have been notes as interviews were not taped).

3. The output of the paper is a series of lists of categories of strategy/activity. While the author concludes that quantitative as well as qualitative work is needed to link activities to outcomes, there is no attempt to draw even qualitatively out those strategies/activities deemed by interviewees to be more or less useful. Finally, given the potential benefit of this paper would be to describe a range of

implementation strategies/activities at state-level, more description of what falls within each category is needed.

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.