

Reviewer's report

Title: A research-based implementation program in the US Department of Veterans Affairs: Crafting culture, capacity, and infrastructure to enhance the evolution of QUERI.

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

Reviewer: Martin Eccles

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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)

Specific comments on this paper

Overall we agree with the reviewers comments that what is being described is probably important but it is quite difficult to get at within the article. You need to address a number of general issues:

The article needs to be shortened and focussed to tell a much clearer story. We think that the story you are telling is how the introduction of the strategic initiative of QUERI necessitated a series of multi-level changes within the VHA. If we are correct then we think what you have to say will be of considerable interest but could be written in half the words. Your examples and Tables need to be much more focussed and shorter.

We think that you could re-consider the structure of the article although the difficulties with this may be a function of the current wordiness of the article and may resolve with a shorter article. We think you should consider a more narrative approach- if this is taken then we could see the beginning of the paper highlighting the changes in the VA over the past 8 years related to increased evidence-based practice; more problem based research (and publishing); etc etc and then the argument that these changes have coincided with QUERI's implementation interventions (efforts and activities) to bring about these changes by focusing on changing culture, capacity and infrastructure and then describe each of these.

We think that the primary focus should be the VA organization/system change and the interventions used by the VA administration to bring about these changes rather focusing specifically on researchers (which is only part of this story). Whilst the focus of the paper could also be on how the VA specifically brought about

change in the HSR researchers, trying to do both is too much for the same paper. We think research funders and other major organizations would be initially more interested in the first option.

As mentioned in the general comments the article is also steeped in QUERI “jargon” and abbreviation which makes it hard going for the non-VA reader. Implementation Science has an international readership and you should keep this in mind throughout the article. You should try to describe initiatives and structures in generic terms that will be clearly understandable to a reader who is hearing about the QUERI for the first time.

At the moment there are relatively few specific comments as I think the article needs a significant re-structuring. However, there is one point which I would like you to consider. At a number of places within the article you talk about study designs other than RCTs for evaluation. In so doing you do not say what the perceived problem with RCTs is. From what you have written at the moment I can pick out three issues – time available for evaluation (Table 3 talks of up to 18 months); the need for pragmatic, real world evaluation, and the integration of the researcher with those delivering the service.

The potential implication is that it isn’t possible to conduct pragmatic trials with some adaptation of an intervention within less than 18 months. This is clearly not true; my reason for highlighting this is that it reflects a view of the methodological world that is much stronger in the US than, say, in the UK. Now, if this is what QUERI believes you should still stick with it – but if you do, you have to say more about what the issues are.

Conclusions- P20- mentions anthropological designs for the first time- should mention in body of the paper is it is important. This is done to some extent but I think it could be expanded- I was looking for the authors to offer general advice (based on their experiences and lessons learned) to those who may be considering the need to transform their organizations to be implementation-focused or to reorient towards implementation - i.e. they could offer the VA steps as a way to consider how to go about making organization/paradigm change toward an implementation perspective and specifically advise on the use the implementation interventions they used/described - in hindsight I am not sure how explicit the authors are about defining their activities (development of new methods and tools, etc) as implementation interventions.

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.