

Reviewer's report

Title: A QUERI approach to formative evaluation: How formative evaluation informed an implementation project to increase vaccination rates in high-risk veterans

Version: 1 **Date:** 17 October 2006

Reviewer: Luciana Ballini

Reviewer's report:

General

The paper deals with a very important aspect of implementation research and development, i.e. process evaluation which is fundamental for pushing this research forward.

Formative evaluation appears to be a very promising step-by-step approach and it is well, though succinctly, described. References to a full discussion of the methods are given for readers willing to have a deeper knowledge and understanding

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

My major concerns relate to the way methods are reported and discussed as well as to the way results are presented.

On page 5 the Authors write they have used a "hybrid design: a 2 year, multi-site, quasi-experimental projec ...". I found that important information was missing, namely how was the study conducted, which were the units of analysis, who or what was recruited, how many participants, how the data was collected and analysed (a before and after study?), whether cross-comparisons were done etc.

For each of the three steps of Formative Evaluation the paper provides examples of interventions or actions, examples of foreseen barriers, example of actual barriers encountered and examples of solutions offered. I find that this list of examples, though very rich, does not satisfy the reader's need to fully grasp the study's results and implications.

It is clear by reading the text that different methods of collecting data have been used, both quantitative and qualitative (es. Vaccination rates; face-to face interviews, focus groups etc.). I found this very interesting and I think this approach, though very challenging, is central to process analysis. However no detailed information is provided on the methods used (how were quantitative data collected and was there an interval ? how were people recruited for interviews or focus groups ? were the interviews structured or unstructured ? was there a coding procedure and what was its structure? how was all this information organised ?).

Results are presented in a narrative way and relate only to few examples, not giving the whole picture that a multi-site study should deserve. At times the reader has the impression of going through researchers' field notes. It would have helped getting quantitative summaries of results not only on the vaccination rates (which are missing) but also for the qualitative analyses.

Moreover a discussion on cross-comparisons results might give more insight and a better understanding of all the problems the process of implementation incurred in. Unfortunately a narrative description of a few examples does not convey the full complexity of the research.

Although the Authors acknowledge in their discussion the lack of measurements and the difficulties in structuring the qualitative results, I think that such a narrative and partial account runs the risk of being poorly informative.

If data are not available I would suggest to include a more detailed discussion on how the data collection was planned, revised and carried out and on how results could be organised and presented.

Though I appreciate this would mean a shift in focus for the paper, I believe that more information on the methodological challenges would be precious for whoever wants to attempt a process analysis.

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

I found the paper a bit hard to follow. Few and simple revisions would make it an easier reading.

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.