PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	Protocol: Improving skills and care standards in the support workforce for older people: a realist review
AUTHORS	Rycroft-Malone, Jo; Burton, Christopher; Hall, Beth; McCormack, Brendan; Nutley, Sandra; Seddon, Diane; Williams, Lynne

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

REVIEWER	Mark Pearson Peninsula Technology Assessment Group (PenTAG), University of Exeter Medical School
REVIEW RETURNED	30-Apr-2014

GENERAL COMMENTS	Summary of main points: 1. Both 'programme theory development' and 'programme theory testing & refinement' are crucial (and far from straightforward) stages of a realist review – greater detail on how these will be conducted would be beneficial (in particular, there is a lack of clarity about whether semi-structured interviews will be used to refine the presentation of findings, or to refine the actual programme theories themselves). 2. The support workforce is missing as a stakeholder group – won't they have pertinent knowledge to contribute through the advisory group? The absence of this group is also a little ironic given that the Introduction notes that the support workforce have become 'an undervalued resource'. Main comments: 1. A number of service reviews are cited in the Introduction, but no conventional systematic reviews of the effectiveness of support workforce development interventions. It would be useful to identify these systematic reviews (if any) and specify how the proposed realist review will answer questions that these other reviews did not (or were not designed to do). 2. The rationale for using realist review, research questions, and summary of the realist approach are clear, readable, and do not over-simplify. 3. 'Theoretical territory' (p6-7) – a range of 'big' theories are signposted here, but how all (some? which?) of these will be incorporated in a way that works towards mid-range theory is unclear. Experience also strongly suggests that 'big' theories alone are insufficient for gaining insight into many areas of complex practice – eliciting and incorporating the 'street level' articulations of knowledge and experience of stakeholders can be vital (the 'theory building workshop' will 'identify and prioritise theory', but it is unclear if it will elicit or use stakeholders' theories). 4. Searches (p8, line 29) – 'complementary searches' – what are the criteria for the depth to which the health and social care literature will be searched before 'complementing' it with searches in policing and

education?

5. Searches – the databases (including grey literature databases) to be searched should be specified.

6. p9, line 3-7 – will a quality appraisal tool (tools?) be used? (none are mentioned)

7. p9, line 3-7 – will the information about e.g sample size, data collection etc. be included on the data extraction forms so that rigour and relevance can continue to be considered throughout all stages of the review? (the data extraction forms are likely to be returned to more than once)

8. p9, line 20 – handsearching – not previously mentioned. If handsearching is proposed, in what journals and for which years?

9. p10 – 'testing and refining programme theories' – unclear whether the semi-structured interviews are intended to refine the presentation of findings, or the actual programme theories themselves.

10. p10 – project outputs – Will the report use the RAMESES reporting guidelines? Shouldn't the support workforce be part of the audience/stakeholders?

Minor comments:
1. The review's sources (health, social care, policing, education) could be noted in the abstract (particularly as this makes the review distinctive).
2. p5, line 19 – 'contextual and structural barriers' – unclear how this point relates to the support workforce.
3. p.8, line 54 – 'In contrast to…' – a rather awkwardly worded sentence.
4. p9, line 12 – 'which makes specific reference to embedded implementation' – I don't know what this means.

REVIEWER	Marie Boltz New York University College of Nursing United States
REVIEW RETURNED	02-May-2014

GENERAL COMMENTS	This protocol for a realist review addresses a critical issue - improving the skills and standards of the support workforce for older people. The demographic, regulatory, and ethical imperatives are clearly and thoroughly described. The research aims and CMO framework are well-aligned to address the knowledge gap which is thoroughly stated. The methods section is elegantly presented with a four phase approach that holds promise to positively impact policy and organizational practices.

VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

1.Whilst a small number of scoping reviews have emerged, we are not aware of any systematic reviews of the effectiveness of support workforce development interventions. We have added a sentence to clarify this, and to provide further rationale for the need for this review (p 5).

2.Thank you.

3. The initial programme theories will be developed in the first phase of the review, informed by the commissioning brief, extant literature, and theory building work with stakeholders including the support workforce. The review will employ a blended approach to theory construction, so that the

development of the programme theory is informed by stakeholders' perspectives in addition to established theories, which will orient explanation building (p7).

4. Our initial search of the literature in health and social care will be complemented by more purposeful searches for support worker development interventions in the wider public service fields of policing and education. Searches in these other literatures will be targeted to enable us to refine the emerging findings from the health and social care literature (p9).

5. A table has been added to show the databases to be included in the search including the grey literature databases (p9).

6.A quality appraisal tool is not being used in the review, as the focus of data extraction including decisions about inclusion and exclusion will be made based on the realist test of 'good and relevant enough' to be included to inform the development of CMOs. This approach is clarified on p10.

7. The data extraction form will be focused on the "good and relevant enough" criteria for inclusion of data. Information about the methods of the study also form part of the data extraction tool.

8. Hand searching is not proposed for this review –the term has been removed from p9.

9.The semi-structured interviews are intended to both enhance the trustworthiness of the resultant programme theories from the evidence review, and to facilitate the development of a final review narrative. Their purpose is now clarified on p11.

10.The support workforce are an integral part of the stakeholders, and are represented at key stakeholder events such as the theory building workshop, as well as membership of the project Advisory group, and as interviewees. This point is clarified on pages 7,11 & 12.

The report of the review will conform to the standards expected in the RAMESES reporting guidelines.

Minor comments:
1.This point is now added on p2.
2.This point has now been clarified p5.
3.Thank you for pointing out –removed p12.
4.Thank you for pointing out –this has been clarified p10.