

Manuscript # 2005/107
Manuscript title: Research on the frontlines of healthcare - A cooperative learning approach

Reviewer #2 comments (written by Mark Parshall for the initial submission):

This is a report on a project to develop a more research-driven culture among ED nursing staff by involving them in developing and conducting a clinical research study. This is an important topic, and the authors/investigators are to be commended for their attention to using a collaborative learning process for building that capacity, and for the obvious enthusiasm they show for the project and the pride they take in what the unit has accomplished so far.

That said, there are a number of problems with the manuscript that make it rather confusing to read. I believe the root of what seems confusing to this reviewer is that, at the sponsoring institution, this was one of a number of projects undertaken in response to broader institutional initiatives. As such, there are several layers to the project (see below) and, from the perspective of the reader, it is not always clear which layer is being focused on. It seems to me that the layers can be characterized as follows:

1. The study took place in a busy ED in a magnet hospital, and magnet status implies certain kinds of organizational values and commitments.
2. Within that broader culture, there was an institution-wide initiative called Growing Organizational Capacity (GOC) quality improvement project that 'house' some 17 'sub-projects' of which this ED study apparently was one.
3. A "touch-time" preliminary study (and, outside of the unit, a somewhat similar preliminary study pertaining to end-of-life care in the ICU; arguably, the similarity is more in methods and organizational goals than in specific problem focus. (Several other subprojects relevant to the ED are mentioned in passing).
4. The present study.

With respect to #4, there are two kinds of outcomes in two different 'populations,' i.e., the organizational and staff development purposes focused on involving ED staff in the process of research and what the results of those efforts might reveal about the patient population, satisfaction, waiting room issues, etc. The most fundamental problem in this reviewer's opinion is that it frequently is very unclear in which of these contextual layers a given statement or paragraph pertains to.

The structure and flow of the article are hard to follow, a problem I believe is subordinate to the multiple layers noted above. In the background section, the authors do a good job of framing the organizational and conceptual context of this project, but the section on Approach (which ought to focus on the specific methods used to generate the results to be presented and discussed), any recitation of specific methods is embedded in continued explication and justification of the conceptual approach (background) and what might be called anticipatory discussion points. This is burdensome for a reader to sort through. By the time one gets to the Results section, the reader's problem is aggravated by ongoing recitation of background and methods leavened by presentation of a few actual results and more anticipatory discussion

points. Because discussion points and study limitations are embedded within earlier sections of the article, the Discussion section itself is extremely brief and not much of a discussion. Overall, the paper is long on background justification and short on results and discussion. Meanwhile, the Methods section is laden with statements that have more to do with the conceptual and organizational background (or perhaps to broader organizational initiative such as their GOC) than to the particular study at hand. The net effect of all these difficulties is that once one has read the entire paper, one is still very uncertain as to what this study actually contributes to knowledge about the ED setting and patients.

A subsidiary issue is that the methods and instruments associated with the actual ED waiting time/satisfaction study were, by and large, not validated. In such a case, at the very least, results have to speak to the reliability and validity of measures before one has any real 'feel' for substantive results or what those measures mean.

I have not commented on the tables and figures because, unless the more fundamental problems are addressed, how appropriate and well-fitting the tables and figures may be is difficult to evaluate.

Another concern (relatively minor compared with the foregoing, hence more easily fixed) is a tendency for somewhat gratuitous comments endorsing the intentions behind this or other organizational initiatives or their implementation (e.g., "being proactive" [p. 3/line 7], "This initiative was aptly named...." [8/1], "We received excellent comments..." [8/19], "The team was fortunate..." [11/1], etc.). More specifically, the assertion that presentation of methods and findings at a conference is evidence of the success of the project (or that the audiences questions and comments were handled with aplomb) may well reflect goals of the organization and the research team, but don't communicate substantive information to a reader who was not present at that meeting.

Lastly, although the APA reference style is generally correct, there are minor deviations from APA formatting (e.g., headings and their formatting do not follow APA levels, page numbers and short titles occur in page footers rather than headers).