Reviewer's report

Title: One-stop or full stop? The continuing challenges for researchers despite the new streamlined NHS research governance process

Version: 1 Date: 15 January 2010

Reviewer: Leslie Gelling

Reviewer's report:

There are some interesting arguments in this paper but I also have some considerable concerns.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. This paper is written in an extremely negative tone which risks painting an inaccurate picture of the current process for research governance review in the NHS. The content may reflect the experiences of the authors but it does not necessarily accurately reflect the current situation. Whilst acknowledging that there are still problems with governance review, this paper is extremely critical whilst lacking a constructive approach to suggesting a way forward.

2. The main criticism in this paper is directed at research governance review and not at ethical review. This needs to be much clearer to the reader from the outset.

3. The content of this paper is not suited to the format in which it is presented. The structure of the paper is that traditionally used to present research findings but the content does not fit comfortably into this format. The arguments might be better presented as a discussion paper or editorial.

Minor essential revisions:

4. In the abstract the ‘ethical and R&D’ processes are described as ‘managerial layers’. It seems rather odd to describe these processes in this way. They may form part of the management of the research project but those involved in ethical or governance review will probably not consider their work ‘managerial’. The wording needs to be changed.

5. On page 3, sentence beginning ‘Ethical practice in research has long been assumed …’ needs some justification and I am not sure it is an accurate reflection of the public perception of research. It may be true that ethical (clinical) practice is an integral part of any code of practice but I need convincing that the public believes the same of practice in research. Clinical professions have repeatedly demonstrated that codes of practice have not prevented unethical research. It is surely a combination of the law (a more recent development) and independent ethical review that does this. I strongly recommend a revision of this wording.
6. It is suggested that it should not be the role of research ethics committees to review the science of applications. This statement demonstrates some lack of understanding of what research ethics committees do. If an application has been through a thorough peer review process, such as the research councils, then the REC will not focus on the science. It remains the case that many applications have still had no review of the science, or an inadequate review, and this is when the REC has no option but to consider the science … ‘bad science is bad ethics’.

7. I need convincing that deficiencies in the current review processes will inevitably result in poorer research outputs (see final paragraph of the conclusion). It seems odd that the quality of a research output can be anything other than the author’s responsibility.

Discretionary revisions:

None.

Throughout the paper there does need to be more balanced arguments and less of a critical attack of the current review processes.

**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.