Reviewer's report

Title: Effects of Self-Management Intervention on Health Outcomes of Patients with Heart Failure: A Systematic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials

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Reviewer: John Cleland

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General
This is a systematic review of randomised controlled trials of self-management. The authors should define what they mean by "self-management". The authors identified only six studies with a total of 857 patients. Self-management seemed to improve outcomes, apart from mortality and to be cost-effective.

The introduction requires revision. There seems to be some confusion, I suspect, between the European Union and the European Society of Cardiology. The latter organisation represents a considerably larger population than that of the European Union.

A major methodological concern is whether all studies of self-management describe themselves as such. For instance, home telemonitoring could be described as a self-management strategy but I suspect this is not included here. The authors need to recognise this major limitation in their search. Also, it is not clear why they restricted the analysis to patients being discharged from hospital. What about self-management of patients enrolled in the community?

In the discussion, the authors talk about blinding but blinding in educational programmes would seem rather difficult.

In summary, the major deficiencies in this paper are the inappropriate restriction in terms of inclusion criteria such as need for hospitalisation and the failure to consider intervention such as telemonitoring, which clearly overlap the group of studies chosen by these investigators and indeed, looking at the last line of the first paragraph of page 6, they should really have been included.

Finally, I think the authors should be a little more circumspect about whether their search strategy was adequate to find all the papers in this area. The statistical analysis is appropriate and the conclusions drawn from the partial data they have elicited are also appropriate.

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

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)