Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 9 May 2006

Reviewer: Robert N Doughty

Reviewer’s report:

General
This systematic review has examined the effectiveness of self management interventions on hospital admissions, mortality and quality of life for patients with chronic heart failure. The authors used Health Canada™'s definition of self-management to assist with identification of suitable studies. The interventions were those which aimed to enable patients to manage their illness. Studies in which health professionals had an active role in the intervention were excluded. With these methods the authors were able to identify 6 suitable studies, involving 857 patients. I have the following comments regarding this paper:

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

1. Self-management strategies are often utilised as part of other multidisciplinary interventions for patients with heart failure, and while this systematic review tries to extend our understanding of the impact of self management alone on outcomes, the reality is that such interventions are also linked, albeit to varying degrees, with intervention from health professionals. For example, the availability of and access to health care will have an impact on outcome however good the self management strategies. Similar to many other interventions it is often very difficult to tease out which specific components of a management strategy have the greatest impact. This exists even among the studies selected for this report, as phone follow up by health professionals was still a component of the intervention in some, and will have impacted on the outcomes. As a result I do not think that the current data in this paper can determine the impact of self-management as part of other interventions, and I would not wish for the reader to consider that such strategies alone will have the desired outcomes for all patients. I also disagree with the authors introduction (pg 4, para 2) which states that disease management studies involve “medical experts leading all aspects of patients care”. This does not fairly represent the many studies that have been performed of management strategies in heart failure in which self management has often played a significant role. I do not think that these messages come across well enough in the discussion of the results presented.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions
**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests