Reviewer’s report

Title: The attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of GPs regarding exercise for chronic knee pain: a systematic review

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Reviewer: Nicola Walsh

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'The attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of GPs regarding exercise for chronic knee pain: a systematic review'

Elizabeth Cottrell, Edward Roddy and Nadine E Foster

Reviewed by Dr Nicola Walsh

Overall Opinion;

This is an interesting and to my knowledge original piece of work, that can potentially add to our understanding of the management of this prevalent condition. The authors have undertaken a thorough search to identify appropriate literature and have made attempts to synthesise the findings. However, I feel that the presentation of findings could be reconsidered to allow the reader to compare/contrast studies with greater clarity. Due to the lack of publication constraints, I also think there is further scope for depth of discussion and interpretation of findings, particularly in relation to current models of care. The variety of methods and included groups included is likely to have yielded significant amounts of information that may be appropriate for meta-study, and could lead to a very informative piece. Please see Paterson et al (2001).

Major Compulsory revisions;

1. Methods (P7)

I'm unclear what you mean by implied beliefs. Is this how you have extracted data from the individual studies, or does it refer to how authors of some of the included studies have interpreted information. Either way, there is a potential serious limitation in the assumptions regarding implied beliefs. You state that a GP recommending rest may have a ‘less than positive attitude towards exercise’. This is clearly not the case, as one must take into account temporal factors, what is actually meant by rest, activity/rest cycling etc. I'm sure you have not made these assumptions (if that is the case, then re-interpretation of data may be required), but the way this is written may require clarification as at present it is open to considerable individual interpretation and therefore bias. If authors of included SLR studies have interpreted data in this way, then this is a significant discussion point.
2. Tables for Presentation of findings (P8)

The information presented in tabular format is lacking in detail and is difficult for the reader to interpret. The authors may wish to consider combining the tables of study type (Tables 1-3), and provide greater depth/clarity of information included (a possible example is detailed below). I felt the current format did not particularly add to the outline in the findings section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study (inc year and location)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Overall quality</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Minor Revisions;

1. Abstract (P2)

The percentage findings across studies appear to have been combined to compare/contrast findings. However, due to the wide range of study type and findings, this is a little misleading and could probably presented more accurately.

2. Background (P4)

Paragraph starting ‘Providing advice to exercise’. The authors are discussing the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura) here, and it may be important to overtly describe that concept, as it is likely to be an important issue when it comes to the discussion in light of the findings.

3. Methods (P5)

PsycINFO, not PsychINFO

4. Methods (P6)

Flow chart of results of search should be included within findings not methods

5. Methods (P6)

As the authors state the constructs under evaluation are complex, and open to a variety of interpretations. For the purpose of the search the definitions are appropriate (although possibly some information regarding how this decision was made, ?group consensus, expert opinion) but there should be a more detailed discussion regarding their interpretation of the constructs, and how that may have influenced their selection and evaluation of findings. There must have been multiple interpretation within the included studies, so information on how you managed that would be required.

6. Methods (P7)

Clarify where provision of a prescriptive leaflet fits. Is that prescriptive or advice?

7. Results (Figure 1)

Figure needs general formatting with less text etc. Also due to the nature of some studies collecting multi-constructs, the final boxes are a little misleading as n=25. A clarifying statement to this effect may be useful.

8. Table 4 (P9)
This table may not be necessary in the current format. It contains a lot of information that is difficult to read. The authors may consider condensing the content into a more readable format.

9. Results (P9)
As with the data included within the abstract, the response rate information requires clarification in light of the previous comment ‘most studies had low response’.

10. Discussion (P11-)
The authors are consistently referring to exercise, but there is no clarification regarding what is actually meant by this (although some information is implied in the search criteria). Is it possible to pull this information out from the included studies, and determine whether there is a tendency to recommend walking for example as opposed to specific lower limb strengthening exercises?

11. Discussion (P11-)
Recognition of the potential source of bias of implied beliefs/attitudes is necessary. This is a limitation of the study that is apparently overlooked.

Discretionary revisions;

1. Abstract (P2)
Consider including ‘frequent cause of mobility and functional limitation’

2. Methods (P5)
Possible mention of Boolean Operators in search terms

3. Discussion (P11-)
Possible discussion to include how the findings fit with the MSK framework within UK would be useful, and very relevant to contemporary management strategies and formation of models of primary care

4. Overall
Consider revisiting the findings and conducting a meta-study, which would be an innovative and potentially very informative means of presenting the work undertaken.

Recommendation;
Response to major revisions required

Quality of written English;
Acceptable

Statistical Review;
No the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician

Declaration of competing interests;
The reviewer has previously received financial support from the Arthritis Research Campaign and Physiotherapy Research Foundation to undertake research regarding the benefits of exercise in CKP/KOA. No other declarations.