Reviewer's report

Title: The concept and definition of therapeutic inertia in hypertension in primary care: a systematic review

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Reviewer: Lawrence Krakoff

Reviewer's report:

Authors:
This survey of how the term ‘therapeutic inertia’ has been used since its inception to medical literature is valuable and carefully performed. You have conducted a thorough search and thoughtful analysis and have clearly delineated how vague and confusing ‘therapeutic inertia’ is as a term of art in medicine. It is then apparent that ‘therapeutic inertia’ be discontinued from use so that better terms are employed. For management of hypertension at the outset and during follow-up, decisions as reflected by the limited documentation of chart review, may be perceived as ‘appropriate’, ‘inappropriate’ or neither. In each case there is usually some degree of uncertainty. "Inertia" or “momentum” taken from physics indicating a fixed course and, in the medical context, is a perjorative term implying blame, as was used by Phillips et al. You have clearly described how the issues of complexity are now far better recognized in the extensive literature you have cited and analyzed. Why not be more bold in suggesting which terms are far better for examining the complicated process of decision making for treatment of the large populations of individual patients with raised arterial pressure, hypertension.

Line 375 “Certainty” This is vague as ‘certainty’ may be high for knowledge (What does the guideline say?) compared to the uncertainty of prediction (What is the likelihood that this patient will benefit (risk ratio with confidence limits) from antihypertensive treatment in the next 10 years?)

Line 383, One never treats ‘hypertension’, only the patient except for population based interventions- eg reducing diet salt at the source)

Lines 432-3 For precision, I suggest that you re-word this sentence to emphasize that “therapeutic inertia” is a made up, fuzzy, arbitrary term that blurs over important components of care.

Lines 436-9. In relation to a given situation, action/inaction may be appropriate, inappropriate and indeterminate. The ‘inertia’ term clearly stimulated many publications and some research, but is a fuzzy concept at best and useless at worst.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
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.