Reviewer's Report

Thank you for the opportunity to read this interesting systematic review manuscript focused on informational continuity in primary care between physicians and patients/caregivers. In general, the paper is thoughtful and well written. The authors have honed in specifically on a critical element of continuity to understand the state of knowledge in the current literature. To this end, they undertook a careful review and documented the methodology employed. The reporting could be improved and I will offer my assessment and suggestions in this regard.

Major compulsory revision

1. Conceptual clarity: Authors move between a general conceptualization of continuity of care and a specific instance of continuity without clarity that the paper addresses a specific element of continuity i.e. family physician patient/caregiver. Definitions and inter-related dimensions described in background relate to continuity in a more general sense. Implicit and probably not what the authors intended is that the informational and relational continuity between primary physician and patient family is continuity. It is of course much more complex with sectors health care, specialists, home care providers and many other elements involved. This is an important framing issue in presenting the results of this work.

Suggest a revision to provide background on continuity of care from a general, theoretical and conceptual vantage point followed by how the authors are interpreting this relative to primary care, family physician practice, and specific focus on one continuity element (informational continuity) and one aspect of informational continuity (FP/pt./caregiver not sector info transfer) for in-depth review. It is a matter of placing their approach in perspective of the larger field. 2nd paragraph in background does this essentially but again is not clear the focus has been narrowed down to specific elements (FP/informational/exchange with pt./caregivers).

I would also argue that the declarative statement (without citations) that continuity is typically characterized by 3 elements (pg. 3) is not necessarily “typical” as the authors so conclusively state but rather represents a viewpoint.

2. The authors undertook a thoughtful systematic review on their topic. The
approach of including all types of paper given the maturity of the field is appropriate. It is not clear why the empirical/research papers could not have been scrutinized more for quality. A clear statement of the objectives or search question should begin the methods section. Unfortunately the results are “trust us” as written since there is little presented on their results except narrative conclusions. The ‘data’ to support conclusions is not transparent. Table 3 is an excellent summary of findings and should be strengthened by adding the ref numbers of the papers supporting these various results. Several more minor revisions related to this are suggested below.

Minor essential revisions

Methods: The review methods are articulated step by step. The iterative approach employed is most beneficial with such a review in order to refine it. This section would be strengthened with a flow chart of the review process for readers to more quickly see the process. Figure 1 comes close and could be expanded upon to include a bit more of the actual methods at each step.

Authors should address the limitation to English language (why and any idea how many foreign language papers were excluded?).

If a reference management software was used this ought to be noted.

Abstracting Form: As the information was extracted and appraised on a standard form by the 2 authors (an important quality factor) could this template be added?

Results: Table 2 pg. 22 is mainly a listing of the final set of 28 papers. Could this table be expanded to strengthen the paper. Suggest:
• first 3 columns could be tightened e.g. combine author and year in one column and drop journal as ref are cited for readers.
• dividing the table by type of papers (Research, theory, editorial/other) as we should rely more on empirical and substantive papers.
• add more appraisal information e.g. study aim/objective, sample and size, or in the case of theory/conceptual papers main intent focus of the paper, and with both implications for informational continuity drawn form your review. Sometimes the population of interest is noted e.g. cancer pt. but mostly not – this may be important info for readers to interpret the review findings.
• Design/method – survey or random chart pulls are methods, describe the study design (e.g. descriptive/exploratory, longitudinal comparative)
• In addition to editorial/essay/critical review add more detail to the “conceptual” category (program description, experiential/reflection,

Results synoptic tables - one is presented in the paper (Table 3) – are there others? This would greatly strengthen the results section.

Discretionary revisions

From a scholarly writing perspective a number of statements are made without
citation support that would strengthen the case being made for this review, e.g.:

• Pg. 4 “…bulk of informational continuity literature focuses on transfer of information between settings.” This later noted (pg. 7 as a result of the review).

• Pg. 5 “…research has est. that these (and other) groups have the most to gain from presence of informational continuity.” (ref 10 & 11 largely support prevalence -incidence)

Methods: it is implicit but it seems the process involved constructing synthesis or synoptic tables relevant to review questions (which are not explicitly stated). This is part of the analysis of the data/information drawn from the papers. This might be added – it is different than loading into an Excel which is data management information.

Results: suggest beginning this section with the general results of the review (pg. 7) first followed by qualitative comments in (place para 1 after para 2 & 3 of that section).

Clarify “qualitative” survey noted in Table 2 (open ended questions?)

**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 have no competing interests.