Reviewer’s report

Title: Effectiveness and feasibility of early rehabilitation programs for geriatric hospital patients: review of randomized controlled trials

Version: 1 Date: 14 August 2013

Reviewer: Catherine Said

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting paper that reviews an issue that is of importance in the field.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The title should be revised as the review also included non randomized controlled trials.

2. The authors should ensure the review conforms to the PRISMA guidelines for a systematic review.

3. I think the authors also need to more clearly articulate that two separate reviews have been conducted.

4. Method: The authors are presenting two related reviews; a review of the effect of exercise and a review of the feasibility of implementing these programs. Do the authors think they may have missed important information about feasibility by limiting the search for this review to articles that included the key word ‘feasibility/feasible’; not all relevant studies would have this as a key word.

5. Figure 1 should more accurately reflect that two separate reviews have been conducted, 1 with 14 papers and 1 with 3 papers.

6. The authors should consider a meta-analysis for length of stay. While for many other outcomes, the differing outcome measures may have prevented this, it is possible for length of stay and would strengthen the results.

7. Results: Feasibility: As discussed above, I think the review strategy selected has resulted in the exclusion of articles that should be included. For example, I would anticipate that some of the reported RCTs would have described recruitment rates.

8. Discussion: I think the discussion overstates some of the findings. For example, First paragraph. The sentence ‘Overall, inpatient rehabilitative programs….’ is misleading, as 2/7 studies looking at ADL found no improvement.

9. Third paragraph. The study that included telephone follow up also include home visits (see Table 2), therefore it is not clear that telephone calls alone can lead to improvements in functional capacity.
10. Fourth paragraph: I am not convinced there is enough evidence to support
the statement that more frail people are more likely to benefit. One issue that was
acknowledged is that some measures demonstrated a ceiling effect, thus the
impact of the intervention may not have been measureable. This issue should
also be addressed in the abstract.

- Minor Essential Revisions

11. Abstract: Results. Typographical error first sentence: ‘de’ should be ‘the’

…’ needs to be reworded.

13. Paragraph 4. Sentence beginning ‘Therefore, in a relevant percentage..” needs to be reworded.

14. Paragraph 4. Sentence beginning ‘This, determining which patient…” needs
to be reworded.

15. Paragraph 4. The aim needs to be reworded

16. Method: Setting: reword “Strength exercises were building up…” to “Strength
exercises where progressed by increasing ….”

17. Paragraph 4. Reword ‘Some studies let…” to “Some studies supported
participants to exercise……’

18. Table 2. Study by Slaets. What outcome measure was used to determine an
improvement in mobility.

19. Results: Activities of daily living. Paragraph 2, last sentence is not clear.

20. Paragraph 3, last sentence. I do not think there is sufficient evidence to
support this statement; only two studies showed an improvement with in hospital
intervention, and in the next paragraph authors state that one of these studies did
show an effect at 3 months.

- Discretionary Revisions

21. Discussion, paragraph 4. The authors should consider discussing why many
studies did exclude people from nursing home. Presumably, in many of these
studies, the aim was to reduce length of stay and facilitate discharge home; or
prevent discharge to residential care; thus people from nursing home were
excluded.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being
published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.