Reviewer's report

Title: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Peer Support for People with Severe Mental Illness

Version: 2 Date: 5 December 2013

Reviewer: Nick Meader

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-conducted systematic review answering a clearly defined research question. The methodology is sound - searches appear comprehensive, standard methods used for critical appraisal/overall quality of evidence etc. The data is rather sparse for the evaluated interventions and these limitations are clearly reported. The overall discussion and conclusions appear sound and reflect the data presented. I have only a few minor comments below.

Discretionary revisions

1) appears to be some minor discrepancies in table 3:

e.g. text says 8 studies provided data on peer support at post intervention but table says 7

5 studies on quality of life is reported in paper and table – but only four studies are referenced as being included in MA

2 studies on depression and anxiety – but three studies referenced as being included in MA

There may be some explanation such as you’re referring to secondary references of the same trial but good to double check everything is reported accurately in table 3.

2) I wonder whether the GRADE ratings are a little harsh. For example, all outcomes were downgraded for reporting bias. You have identified some evidence of selective reporting and where this is the case then I agree there should be a downgrade. However, there are some meta-analyses which include only studies at low risk or unclear risk of reporting bias according to your Cochrane risk of bias ratings but are still downgraded (e.g. see peer support recovery outcome). Where this is the case perhaps more justification for suspecting reporting bias should be included in the text - it may be there but could have missed it.

Also peer support recovery outcome is downgraded for inconsistency with I2=27% and chi2 not statistically significant. Doesn’t the methods section suggest you would downgrade if I2>50% and chi-squared statistically significant? Good to justify in the text why you downgraded in this particular case.
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 I have no competing interests