Reviewer’s report

Title: Nursing instruction improves outcomes for lupus and rheumatoid arthritis patients receiving steroid pulse therapy

Version: 1 Date: 17 November 2009

Reviewer: Sarah Hewlett

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for asking me to review this interesting observational study of an educational intervention by nurses for patients receiving steroid therapy by injection.

Major Compulsory revisions

1) The English needs attention throughout, as currently it is difficult to understand the methods and hence also the results.
2) Title - this is not a randomized controlled trial, therefore we cannot be sure that it was the nursing intervention and not the steroid that improved outcomes, unless you are talking about knowledge outcome.
3) Abstract - 'need for nursing instruction' needs to be clarified, what exactly does this mean? In addition, the level of the difference (ie the results) rather than just the level of significance should be reported.
4) Methods - Was ethics approval obtained?
5) 'the need for nursing instruction' survey - please clarify what you asked by giving the question. Was it how distressed patients were for each of the 9 categories, or whether they wanted more information?
6) 'to evaluate cognitive level'. Do you mean knowledge level? Is this a separate questionnaire?
7) Who delivered the nursing intervention, was it one nurse, or several nurses? What was the intervention exactly? Had it been standardized, or was it just the nurses' usual practice? Was it written or verbal? Was it individualized? How long did the intervention last - it was given over 2 days but was that for 10 minutes each day, or 6 hours?
8) How do you know this was a sufficient number of patients? Was there a sample size calculation?
9) Results - 63 patients participated, but how many declined and were they any different to those who consented?
10) Was the weight change an increase or decrease?
11) Paragraph 2, what was the level of symptom distress? It wasn't possible to understand from the methods section how this was measured. It would be helpful if you could use the same phrases in both sections.
12) Which timepoint are the data in Table 3?
13) Patients had either RA or SLE - did you analyse them separately and were they different in their education needs?
14) Discussion - It is stated that patients needed information about all the 9 categories at all 4 timepoints - but if your intervention has been successful, shouldn't the need have reduced by the end?
15) Limitations need to be discussed. In particular this was not a randomized controlled trial therefore we do not know whether patients would have gained this knowledge anyway during standard nursing care? We cannot be sure that it was the nursing intervention that made the difference.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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’