Reviewer's report

Title: Advanced practice physiotherapy in patients with musculoskeletal disorders: a systematic review

Version: 3 Date: 26 March 2012

Reviewer: Miranda Laurant

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Methods:
1) Analyses are not reported; to be added. It seems a descriptive report of findings.
2) Unclear which study designs are included.
3) Unclear if the 4 categories were defined a priori (in that case it should be reported in the methods) or that is a result of studies identified (in that case it should be reported in the results).
4) Methodological quality appraisal, not clear why the authors choose four different appraisal instruments.
5) In the results the authors report a % score (e.g. page 11 There was a wide range in the quality of the individual studies (from 25% to 93%). It is unclear how this score is calculated and how to interpret these scores.
6) Which outcomes did the authors want to include? Clinical outcomes, process of care outcomes, cost outcomes?
7) Use of subheading would improve readability.

Results:
1) A description of flow of studies is lacking (only presented in figure 1)
2) Design of studies is lacking with the exception of ‘cohort studies’.
3) ‘Medial diagnostic….etc’: start with number of studies included, design and the main outcomes measured. Next report main findings. It is unclear why these aspects of methodological quality are reported and not others. If this is more clearly described in methods, the results are more easy to follow.
4) Cohort studies….. why included the ‘design’ in the heading. The topic is effectiveness of treatment. In the result the design of these studies should be reported. Methodological assesment see previous remarks. This is also valid for the other 2 topics discussed.
5) Use subheadings to improve readability

Discussion:
1) This is a repetition of results. Discussion should be written at a more abstract level.

2) It includes new results (e.g. page 17: In terms of health service use, two studies measured the proportion of X-rays ordered, etc. ....). Outcomes should be reported in the ‘results’ not in the discussion.

3) Comparison could be shorter.... what does this review add to the 2 (or 3?) other reviews. Not interested in the limitations of these other reviews.

4) The present systematic review has many strengths; there are not that many strengths. There seems to be more limitations.

Minor Revisions

Introduction:

1) It seems odd to write that new interprofessional models of care that often involve the extension of the scope of practice for allied health professionals. Please re-structure the introduction to make it more sound. Start with reasons new roles emerge, historically nurse practitioners and physician assistants, more recent physiotherapists… this is focus of review.

2) Relative long introduction, but it does not end in “the aim of this review…. “.

3) Table 1: Order of the studies in line with order of report in main text. Meaning that 7 studies related to ‘medical diagnosis, trage and clinical recommendations’ are presented first, followed by ‘effectiveness of treatment’ etc. In that way it provides the reader a quick overview of papers. If more than one topic is discussed.

Please explain “n”; to avoid misinterpretation (this is number of patients not number of practices or providers.)

4) Table 2 – 4: Methodologic quality. Although the items are explained in legend of the table I would prefer to see short description in table instead of item 1, item 2 etc. If short description is shown, it is much easier to see which are potential biases.

5) Abstract:

Conclusion: it seems odd to start with ‘at present there is limited evidence about APP care,….’ This is not conclusion of the studie. What is the main message, the take home message.

Discretionary Revisions

1) Don’t use terms extended scope roles, advanced physiotherapy practice (APP), new models of care, but choose for one definition to increase readability of the paper. Advanced physiotherapy practice (APP) is best term to be used and can be defined in the introduction, and used throughout the paper.
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