Reviewer's report

Title: A systematic review of psychosocial interventions for family carers of palliative care patients

Version: 1 Date: 10 February 2010

Reviewer: Ann-Louise Caress

Reviewer's report:

The paper relates to a clinically important topic and provides a useful update of knowledge in the chosen area. The methods used are broadly appropriate. Presentation of data is clear. The discussion is rather repetitious of results and could have been developed further to identify commonalities (or lack thereof) across interventions - this would enhance its usefulness to both clinicians and researchers

Major Compulsory Revisions

The authors have included qualitative studies, which seems anomalous in a study focusing on interventions. This needs robust justification.

Some of the papers included focus on symptom control. It is not readily apparent how this can be defined as a psychosocial intervention - this needs to be justified and/or the 'psychosocial' element of the intervention better identified. Related to this, there seems to be some mixing of focus ie in some included studies, the intervention itself focuses on psychosocial aspects, whilst in others the authors' focus seems to be on psychosocial outcomes, with the intervention not being clearly identifiable as a 'psychosocial intervention'.

There is considerable reiteration of results in the discussion. This needs to be reduced. The paper would benefit from a sentence or two highlighting whether any approaches/intervention components were commonly identified across the studies, or not and whether it was possible to determine whether these were consistently positively evaluated or not

Minor Essential Revisions

The sample column of the summary table does not always indicate who the sample actually were (ie in several places the number of participants/drop-outs is provided, but not the clinical focus/diagnostic group of the cared for). This needs amendment

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 that I have no competing interests