Reviewer's report

Title: Decision aids for community service choices by carers of people with dementia: a mixed method evaluation

Version: 1 Date: 6 October 2011

Reviewer: Georgina Charlesworth

Reviewer's report:

I was interested to review this paper as I was not aware of any work on decision aids for family carers of people with dementia. Although there is a large body of work on the provision of information, including information about services, this has not previously extended to an explicit decision aid. The authors highlight the challenges of providing a decision aid with this group, including the challenges of an uncertain course of illness and wide variability of services, and also the differing view points of family carers and 'professional' staff. The authors correctly acknowledge the lack of statistical significance and the limitations of a small sample size.

Major Compulsory Revisions
- The authors should consider the guidelines of the CONSORT statement in reporting their RCT, even though it is a pilot and with small numbers. A CONSORT diagram illustrating the flow of participants through the RCT would enhance reporting and clarify the numbers included in the analysis.
- Numbers included in the outcome analyses should be included in tables 2 & 3, and if a final score or difference score was assigned for those 2 intervention and 3 control group participants who did not complete the endpoint measures then the method for this should be described.
- as the analysis was a comparison of change scores, the results should all be described in those terms i.e. less increase, greater decrease
- The title should make clear that the decision aid was for respite choices (rather than the implication of aids for community services more broadly). At present the paper describes 'development and pilot RCT' rather than 'mixed methods evaluation'.
- If qualitative feedback was part of the evaluation design (as is implied in the abstract), the method for gathering and analysing this information should be described.

Minor revisions
- p.12 missing full stop at end of final paragraph
- p. 9 final 3 lines - repetition of values ("values process values")

Discretionary Revisions
- I would have found the manuscript easier to follow if it had been reported in two stages of (1) development work methods and results, followed by (2) pilot RCT methods and results.

- Information on characteristics of sample includes data for burden and decision conflict (p.7) before these measures have been introduced (p.8-9). Perhaps these can be re-ordered.

- As the aim of the pilot was to trial procedures for recruitment, intervention and data collection it would be beneficial to revisit all of these aspects in the discussion, including consideration of recruitment strategies and eligibility criteria (inc exclusion of the most distressed carers) and also to have an indication of the sample size required in a full trial, based on the findings of this pilot.

**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.