Reviewer's report

**Title:** Effects of case management in community aged care on client and carer outcomes: a systematic review of randomized trials and comparative observational studies

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 30 July 2012

**Reviewer:** Susanne Hempel

**Reviewer's report:**

**Essential revisions**

Abstract

1. The expression "In accordance with the PRISMA checklist" should be revised (PRISMA is a reporting guideline, not a systematic review guideline; you could potentially cite the PRISMA statement but the PRISMA checklist is an explicitly a tool for authors helping them to remember what to report)

2. If the databases were searched from inception this should be stated rather than listing the individual inception dates

3. "non-RCTs" is too general, it should be stated clearly which study designs were eligible

4. The expression 'five of the six studies' is unclear: which 6 studies? it should be stated clearly that of the 6 studies that assessed the outcome 5 reported significant improvements etc. if this was the case.

5. The conclusion is too strong. There was no meta-analysis and the conclusion seems to be based on vague statements from the authors of the individual studies rather than actual empirical data.

Background

6. The definition presented in the first sentence is very specific. The sentence should state the source clearly, there are other definitions of case management and the accompanying reference is a discussion paper of the Australian Case management Society which cites the WHO and the American Case Management Society definitions.

7. It is not obvious why the 10 other systematic reviews on case management refer to "other types of community-based care settings". Judging from the titles and abstracts several seem to cover the same setting. The background section should state more clearly how the scope of this review is different from existing reviews.

Methods

8. It is not clear why disease management programs are excluded from the review. The inclusion criteria should state clearly what was included instead if the
main application was not eligible.

9. The expression "Not only looking at old people" should be revised

10. The description of reference mining should be revised ("were tracked")

11. The description of the quality assessment criteria should be revised. The Cochrane Library doesn't publish quality criteria, the authors probably mean the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions.

12. The Alzheimer Disease Demonstration program and Channeling Demonstration and Evaluation program should be referenced by study, not by simply referring to Table 4.

Results

13. It seems unlikely that all included studies could be described a) as "demonstration programs" and b) that targeted "frail elderly people". This should be clarified.

14. See comment 4 and revise the result description accordingly (e.g., "Six of the eight studies")

15. The client outcomes in the method and the result section should be ordered better. Eligible were clinical patient outcomes as well as satisfaction with care? These are completely different classes of outcomes, they cannot be presented in random order. There were many "psychological conditions", this heading in particular is not a good description for the outcomes stress, strain, mental health, carer depression.

Discussion

16. The first sentence is too strong. The review didn't show that the interventions significantly improved client and carer satisfaction. The reference to significance implies that statistically significant effects were shown. Presumably not all studies showed this, exact results were not extracted or documented.

17. The results summary need to state the comparator - improved compared to what?

18. The outcomes are extremely diverse. They should not be discussed in combination and the result section does not indicate that results were equally positive for satisfaction as well as health outcomes.

19. The results of this review need to be compared to the existing literature in the discussion section.

20. The systematic review conduct needs to be mentioned in the limitations. A single reviewer did the title and abstract screening, the full text screening, the data extraction and quality assessment - no attempt was made to prevent reviewer errors or bias. Review language bias also needs to be discussed.

Tables

21. Table 2 does not contain sufficient information to be useful for the reader. It should either be deleted and the information should be added to the notes of Table 4 or the quality criteria should be specified (e.g., how was adequate
randomization defined).

22. The comparator needs to be stated in Table 4.

Minor essential revisions

23. The manuscript needs to be edited by a copy editor. Almost every paragraph contains problematic sentences. Scientific accuracy would help, too (e.g., "Among the 13 studies related to client outcomes" should be revised to 'reporting client outcomes' etc.).

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**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.