Reviewer's report

Title: Telephone consultations in place of face to face out-patient consultations for patients discharged from hospital following surgery: a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 21 December 2012

Reviewer: Helen Atherton

Reviewer's report:

This is a very interesting review in an important area.

Major compulsory revisions:
1. Background (pg 4): You state ‘to date, no direct comparison has been made between face-to-face follow-up consultation and those made by telephone in the context of surgical follow up care.’ This contradicts the findings of your review. Did you mean there has been no systematic review of studies comparing the two? I’m not clear what you wanted to say, so please revisit.

2. Eligibility criteria (pg 5): You do not state the types of studies you included. If there were no restrictions on study type included then please state this.

3. Summary measures and data analysis (pg 6): As you ended up doing a narrative synthesis I think you need to revisit this entire section. The detail on how you would do statistical analysis is probably not necessary.

4. Results; study selection (pg 7): You refer to five papers, but in fact these represent four studies. You should therefore refer to the review including four studies, not five papers. You can still tell readers that there are five papers, but it is the studies themselves that we are interested in.

5. Results; study selection (pg 7): You continually refer to papers/publications when you should refer to studies. Please change.

6. Results; patient satisfaction outcomes (pg7): This section is very long. It would assist the reader if you added a summary sentence to the beginning of the section, summarising what you found across the four studies before going on to add in the detail.

7. Results; frequency of complications (pg8): you give a proportion (n=48) but what is the denominator? Please add this into the text.

8. Discussion (pg9):

8.1 The first paragraph of the discussion should focus more on the quality of the included studies and what this means for the findings. You may also wish to discuss the study designs identified and how some provide more reliable evidence than others.
8.2 You do not acknowledge as a limitation the fact that although your search was systematic it is possible that you missed something e.g. you only looked at studies in the English Language.

8.3 Conclusion (pg10): It would be a good idea to mention the quality of the studies again. You might also want to suggest that any further work conducted is rigorous.

8.4 Table 2: Setting needs to be reported more consistently. The intervention/comparator column is not very easy to follow.

Minor essential revisions:

9. Abstract: please consider adding the study types included to the methods section of the abstract. When reading the abstract this information would allow the reader to make an assessment about the review type.

10. Eligibility criteria (pg5): The sentence beginning ‘Studies were included if they…..’ is very long, please could you split it or change it.

11. Results; study selection (pg 7): You can reduce the amount of text in this section by just referring to the figure. Much of the detail in the text is not necessary.

12. Discussion (pg9): Where you say ‘identify any good comparative evidence’ please consider changing this to say you did find evidence but it was of low quality, since you have assessed quality.

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

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