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: 18 January 2013

Reviewer: Brian McKinstry

Reviewer’s report:

General report

Thank you for asking me to review this paper which reviews the evidence for safety and cost effectiveness of telephone consultations for follow up following surgery.

In terms of the methods often systematic reviewers scrutinise references in full papers as a potential source of new publications. They may have done so and if they have should state that. Again often reviewers will contact authors for further information, this might have been helpful with one study. Again they may have done this and if so should record it.

I would have liked a description of how satisfaction questionnaires were carried out. Were some of them carried out by phone and some by post or face to face. Even if the same or similar questionnaires were used this could have an influence on how they were completed. Where results were shown not be statistically different some opinion as to whether or not the study was likely to be sufficiently powered to make such a statement might be helpful.

How were adverse events extracted or established? Was there the potential for systematic bias in the way this may have been done for different groups particularly retrospective v prospective. How costs were calculated might have been interesting given the very low costs for phone calls and home visits mentioned in the text.

The discussion I thought was a little sparse. Why did none of the studies in the Cochrane review overlapped theirs (by the way this reference is missing)? Quite a few studies in the Cochrane review are not mentioned in theirs and it would be useful to know why (see below they all look eligible).

Emerson 2000 {published data only}  

Hartford K, Wong C, Zakaria D. Randomized controlled trial of a telephone intervention by nurses to provide information and
support to patients and their partners after elective coronary artery bypass graft surgery: effects of anxiety.


Roebuck A. Telephone support in the early post-discharge period following elective cardiac surgery: does it reduce anxiety and depression levels?. Intensive and Critical Care Nursing 1999;15(3): 142–6. [MEDLINE: 4470]

Weaver LA, Doran KA. Telephone follow-up after cardiac surgery: facilitating the transition from hospital to home. American Journal of Nursing 2001;101(5):2400, 24QQ, 24SS. [MEDLINE: 10819]

What does their review add to the cochrane review other than the focus on surgery?

I take issue with the view that there has been very little research on telephone consulting there is really a great deal out there admittedly mainly in primary care but this should be referred to.

Major Revisions:
Explain why several apparently suitable papers were not included.
Mention mode of application of satisfaction questionnaires (i.e. by telephone post or face to face)
Minor. State whether or not authors were approached

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