Reviewer's report

Title: Can life coaching improve health outcomes? - a systematic review of intervention studies

Version: 1 Date: 19 June 2013

Reviewer: Blythe O'Hara

Reviewer's report:

Major revisions

Comment one:

With the growing evidence base surrounding the use of “coaching” in the sphere of the world of business (executive coaching), personal lives (life coaching) and health (health coaching that encompasses health education through to chronic disease management) – there is a case for attempting to use the same terminology to describe similar concepts. Whilst I understand that you specifically looked at life coaching interventions as opposed to health coaching interventions, in my mind this distinction comes too late in your manuscript. Accordingly I suggest two changes:

• In the abstract (page 2, paragraph 3) – detail that you have chosen to focus ONLY on those interventions that can be described as life coaching but incorporate a range of health related outcomes (irrespective of what the focus of the coaching process was) under methods
• On page 5 – add more detail about why you did not focus on health coaching, and accordingly did not include health coaching interventions

Comment two:

Page 2 (abstract, paragraph 3) – heading of methods:
The methodologic quality was independently assessed by three of the authors using a criteria list inspired by the lists developed by Moja, Olsen, and Cherafi-Sohi et al.

It seems unusual to use a reference in the abstract (which should be seen as a stand alone document), I would suggest that the authors redraft this sentence accordingly.

Comment three:

Page 2 (abstract paragraph 4) – heading of results:
Results: Four studies were included; two of them where randomized controlled trial and met all quality criteria. The two studies investigating objective health
outcomes (HbA1c) showed mixed, but promising results especially according to the patient group that usually does not benefit from intensified interventions.

trial replace with trials
intensified replace with intensive

The results could also include the number of studies that originally sourced, when the first search was undertaken.

Comment four:

Page 3 – key words should include health coaching

Comment five:

Page 4 (second paragraph)
In a review about strategies for improving the outcomes of diabetic patients, coaching has been suggested as a supplemental method [5,6].

Health coaching has been used in more chronic disease “clientele” than just those with diabetes, for example cardio-vascular disease patients. The authors should explain why they have focused exclusively on diabetes here or broaden their explanation to include other health related areas of coaching.

Comment six:

Page 4 (third paragraph)
An unsystematic review of coaching as a method to improve the outcomes of patients resulted in very few published studies.

The authors should reference or source this statement? Or at least describe the context as to why this review was undertaken was it to inform this review, or for another purpose??

Page 6 (third paragraph)
The major research question detailed that you were interested in assessing “patient outcomes of life coaching” – the title and abstract of your manuscript implies that you are interested in “health-related” patient outcomes of life coaching. I would suggest amending the research question to incorporate the health outcomes you are interested in eg: health behaviours, patient self care etc

Minor revisions

Comment seven:

Page 7 (third paragraph)
In accordance with the description of life coaching [12,17], the coaching interventions eligible for inclusion were coaching that was based on the agenda of the patient and reflecting the present wishes and needs of the patients. The dialogue was holistic, individualized, and non-programmatic. It included studies in
which the coaching was as follows:

• conducted by professional coaches or healthcare professionals with special training in coaching;
• conducted as face-to-face, telephone, or internet coaching, or a mixture of these methods; and
• individual or group sessions, or a mixture of the methods.

To ensure that the reader understands that you have ONLY included life coaching interventions I think it would be useful to identify in this paragraph that the goals of the client and the coaching interaction were NOT health related goals.

Comment eight:

Page 7 (fifth paragraph)
Criteria for excluding studies for this intervention
As a consequence of the description of the coaching method, interventions characterized by an external defined and fixed agenda, such as learning programs and health promotion programs, were excluded. This also counts for coaching interventions that were part of a program and were not evaluated separately. Coaching interventions targeting parents of paediatric patients were also excluded.

More clarification needed here – you excluded executive and health coaching programs (whether or not they reported on health related outcomes)?

Comment nine:

Page 9
Perhaps the use of “yes” “no” would be better rather than done and not done, where possible.

Comment ten:

Page 10 (paragraph three, under heading of description of intervention)
It seems that all papers would have had to have had sufficient enough detail in relation to the description of the intervention for the authors to ascertain that they were “life coaching” as opposed to health or executive coaching. Can you add some detail as to how this criteria was used to determine the type of intervention that was used?

Comment eleven:

Page 13
Schneider et al. [25] did not receive any points because the description of the methodology was unclear.

Consider using the phrase that the methodology did not contain sufficient
Comment twelve:

Page 13

The opening paragraph could benefit from linking more closely to your research questions, there were only a small number of trials that were identified as using a life coaching process that reported on health outcomes etc… I think the important point here is that you were looking at LIFE coaching interventions and HEALTH outcomes….

Comment thirteen

Page 13

We did not distinguish between face-to-face coaching and telephone coaching, because coaches do not make this distinction.

I think this statement needs a reference, further behavioural interventions have varied effectiveness based on whether the intervention is face to face or telephone or expert system based (or a combination). It would be reasonable to assume that different delivery modes of coaching make a difference to outcomes; even though coaches themselves may not distinction between modes of delivery.

Comment thirteen

Page 13

motivating interview

replace with “motivational interviewing”

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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