Author's response to reviews

Title: Structure and governance of health and welfare systems relevant to diabetes self-management: a realist review to facilitate a European Project implemented in six countries

Authors:

Antonis Kousoulis (antonis.kousoulis@gmail.com)
Evridiki Patelarou (evridiki.patelarou@kcl.ac.uk)
Sue Shea (sueshea1@otenet.gr)
Christina Foss (i.c.foss@medisin.uio.no)
Ingrid A Ruud Knutsen (i.a.r.knutsen@medisin.uio.no)
Elka Todorova (elka.todorova@me.com)
Poli Roukova (poliroukova@yahoo.com)
MC Portillo (mportillo@unav.es)
Maria J Pumar-Méndez (mpumarme@unav.es)
A Mujika (amujika@unav.es)
Anne Rogers (A.E.Rogers@soton.ac.uk)
Vassilev Ivaylo (I.I.Vassilev@soton.ac.uk)
Manuel Serrano-Gil (manuel.serrano@globalalliancesms.org)
Christos Lionis (lionis@galinos.med.uoc.gr)

Version: 3
Date: 22 July 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
Manuscript: Structure and governance of health and welfare systems relevant to diabetes self-management: a realist review to facilitate a European Project implemented in six countries

Authors’ point-by-point responses

Reviewer: Andrew Gray

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript sets out a realistic review of the literature around diabetes self-management. It seems to be comprehensive and I didn’t notice any substantial omissions in terms of studies. The interpretations seemed sound. It was a pleasure to read and I found it useful in thinking about how future interventions could be designed in this area. I should note that my areas of research are biostatistics, which has involved some work involving diabetes, so my focus for this review has been in those areas rather than health systems. My comments are a few suggestions for additional information and a small number of typos that the authors should be able to correct easily enough.

Response: We thank the reviewer for his kind comments and we have followed all of his suggestions in our revised manuscript.

Discretionary Revisions

1. I would suggest that the authors follow the convention of writing numbers as words when these are ten or less (e.g., “6” several times on page 3 and elsewhere).

Response: Numbers less than ten, have been written out in the revised manuscript on several occasions (pages: 3, 6, 8, 12, 13, 24, 25), with the exception of common conventions (e.g. type 2 diabetes).

2. I’d also suggest adding the capitalised definite article before “United Kingdom” and “Netherlands”. This isn’t done in the abstract, for example, but the latter is given as “The Netherlands” at some places in the body of the manuscript (e.g., page 17) and in an uncapsulated form on page 18.

Response: The capitalised definite article has now been added before “United Kingdom” and “Netherlands” throughout the revised manuscript (pages: 3, 5, 7, 12, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25).

3. The order of the countries in the abstract (page 3) doesn’t match the order on page six under “The EU-WISE Project” or page 7 in the first list item. In all cases, the last list item should be preceded by “and”.

Response: The order of the countries has been systematised in the revised manuscript and “and” has been added before the last country in the list, Greece (pages: 3, 6, 7).
4. The term “salient visible” isn’t a word combination I’ve encountered before. While I could understand its intention, perhaps different wording would be useful for the reader?

*Response:* The expression has been replaced by the word important (page 5).

5. Hyphens are inconsistently used for “meso-level” (present in the abstract, page 3; but not on page 6). Perhaps a quick search for these?

*Response:* A hyphen now precedes “level” on all occasions (revised in pages 6, 13).

6. A spurious comma following “EU project” on page 7.

*Response:* The comma has now been deleted (page 7).

7. Second list item on page 7, suggest adding “chronic disease management [in general] and diabetes in particular”

*Response:* The sentence has been revised as indicated (page 7).

8. Spurious space before hyphen in list item 3 on page 8.

*Response:* The extra space has now been deleted (page 8).

9. Suggest adding “skill mix [and the] role of” to list item 5 on page 8.

*Response:* The sentence has been revised as indicated (page 8).

10. In terms of information resources, I wonder if the authors could justify not using Google Scholar. This may be useful in identifying grey literature, which a review such as this ought to be able to make good use of.

*Response:* This particular systematic review aimed at identifying the peer-reviewed literature on the subject. There were other strands in the wider EU-WISE project that looked into the grey literature; work and publication on those is pending. We have now clarified this in our manuscript: “a literature review to summarise the peer-reviewed published scientific literature in the field (stage 1)” (page 9).

11. Typo on page 11 in “their findings we[re] reproduced?”

*Response:* This has now been corrected (page 11).

12. Spurious formal on page 11 in “to supplement formal the formal critical appraisal”

*Response:* The word has now been deleted (page 11).

13. The point on page 14–15 about locally developed education programmes being less effective was interesting and I wonder if the authors could add some comments (even if speculative) as to why this might be the case?

*Response:* A referenced sentence was added on page 15: “This is most likely attributed to the fact that study interventions are applied in a controlled environment, strictly following guidelines and not subject to the limitations of routine practice, but long term impact should also be taken into account”. 
14. There were a few issues with possessive apostrophes, both missing, e.g., “God’s will” on page 15, and “professional’s” and “patient’s” on page 16, and spurious, e.g., in “patients’ belonging to either” on page 16.

Response: All these instances have now been corrected (pages 15, 16).

15. “Internet” should be capitalised (e.g., page 20).

Response: Internet is now capitalised throughout the revised manuscript (pages: 3, 13, 18, 20).

16. I think 52% on page 23 would be better described as “over half of...” rather than “a significant percentage of...”

Response: The sentence has been revised as indicated (page 23).

17. On page 24, “strive” should be “striving”.

Response: The word has now been corrected (page 24).

18. I would suggest that an additional limitation would be the possibility of articles not being found by the search strategy. Another possible and related limitation for the authors to include would be effects from publication biases.

Response: We have followed a strict systematic methodology and further quality appraised all the included articles using the Dixon-Woods criteria (page 11), to eliminate the risk of these limitations. A clarifying sentence has now been added in page 25: “Based on the strict systematic method and quality appraisal of included articles, every effort was made not to omit published papers as well as to eliminate bias”.

19. In the conclusions, I would add the number of studies to the first sentence, alongside the numbers of participants and countries.

Response: The number of “56 published papers” has been added in the first sentence of the Conclusion (page 25).

20. Table 2 could include a few small points of clarification about the studies. a. For DAFNE, could you define “long term” in the findings? b. Rather than saying “To come” for the Whole Systems Model and Dialog, could you say “Protocol paper only”? c. In general, it would be useful to incorporate p-values into the findings to enable the reader to distinguish between tendencies, and weak versus strong statistically significant findings.

Response: “Long term” has been defined for DAFNE (4 years, page 44), and the suggest revision was done for studies where only the protocol was available (pages 50, 52). A quantitative aspect (primarily to indicate level of significance) has been added in each line of the table (pages 44-54).

Reviewer: Claus Wendt

Reviewer's report:
This is a review of quantitative studies of diabetes self-management arrangements in six countries. The authors present five research questions, however they do not provide any information how they arrived at these questions. It is certainly not sufficient to state that “after the background search that gave a feel for the literature ... the key themes to explore were guided by the following questions”. They need to exactly explain how they developed the research questions and need to refer to the respective literature.

Response: We thank the reviewer for the insightful comments and we have revisited the questions to make them more targeted to the eventual conclusions of this manuscript as the methodology of the realist review suggests. The revised set of questions is included in pages 7-8. It should be noted that detailing the long process of the design of the project and putting together the initial research questions falls out of the scope of this manuscript, but rather into the greater design of the collaborative project (http://eu-wise.com/). It has been clarified that in the manuscript we are trying to address the methodology of the Realist Review, by discussing how the review of the literature refined the research questions. Some relevant literature references as indicated in the introduction provide the background for the formulation of the initial questions: References 3-5 and 7-9 for Question 1; References 7-9 for Questions 2; References 5-6 for Question 3; References 4-5 for Question 4; References 6-9 for Question 5.

The same concerns the method used for this study. The authors should lay down exactly how the two-stage research method has been developed and not only inform the reader that they followed the “predefined research protocol of the EU-WISE project”.

Response: The reviewer makes a valid point. This paragraph has been revised accordingly. In fact, it hasn’t been the predefined protocol that guided the method, but the background work on the realist review as indicated in the previous paragraph. This section now reads: “We drew on the principles of the realist review as this strategy for synthesising research aims to unpack the mechanisms of how complex programmes work in particular contexts and settings (what works for whom and in what circumstances). As first step in the design of the review, the underlying assumptions about how an intervention is meant to work and what impacts it is expected to have were identified and the relevant theoretical framework was put together [11]. To that end, a literature review to summarise the peer-reviewed published scientific literature in the field (stage 1) was followed. Relevant papers were then synthesised narratively (stage 2).” (pages 8-9).

The search terms are sufficiently described. However, the authors need to explain in more detail why “self care” had to be specified by either “support” or “management” (but by no other terms) and why it has been important to specify the search by “health care system OR social welfare OR policy OR providers OR government OR skill-mix”.

Response: We thank the reviewer for the comment. We have clarified in our revised manuscript: “Various search terms were used to include both MeSH terms and other glossary databases. Guided by entry terms in MeSH and mapped terms in Emtree thesaurus, the main ones used were:” (page 9).

The analysis (and conclusion) does not directly answer the five research questions presented in the beginning. I would therefore suggest to specify the currently somewhat overlapping research questions and focus more directly on answering the questions.
Response: In agreement, as indicated above we have revised the questions (pages 7-8) to make them more directly targeted to the results drawn from this literature realist review.

Furthermore, the authors do not really analyze the “structure and governance of health and welfare systems” in six countries. They may change the title into something like “A review of diabetes self-management arrangements in European countries” and concentrate on self-management concepts in different countries & skip the focus on healthcare systems respectively welfare states.

Response: This is a valid point and the title has been revised to: “Diabetes self-management arrangements in Europe: a realist review to facilitate a Project implemented in six countries” (page 1).