Reviewer's report

Title: Interventions aimed at reducing problems in adult patients discharged from hospital to home: a systematic meta-review.

Version: 1 Date: 17 January 2007

Reviewer: Diane E. Holland

Reviewer's report:

General
The objective of this meta-review paper is to 'identify, appraise, and synthesize the evidence presented in reviews of the literature for the effectiveness of discharge interventions in reducing post-discharge problems in adults discharged home from an acute general care hospital.' The framework used for the review provided additional clarity to understanding the findings and is a notable strength of the project. The methods were clearly presented.

There are a couple weaknesses that I recommend the authors address.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The title, abstract, stated objective, and background information focus on 'problems' patients experience or that are present after discharge. Further, discharge interventions are judged as effective if they reduce (prevent, ease, or solve) post-discharge problems. The dependent variables in the first and third study questions seem to go beyond the scope of 'problems.' While length of hospital stay, discharge destination, and health care services and costs are often used as proxy measures of effective discharge planning, I recommend strengthening the definition of 'problems' in this meta-review, thereby clarifying the relationship to the outcome variables stated in the questions.

2. One inclusion criterion was that reviews were to be of adults post-discharge from acute general hospitals. The Johnson, Sandford & Tyndall (2004) review was included, while it is noted that the two trials in their review measured responses from parents of pediatric patients. I believe that this review does not meet the inclusion criteria as stated, and recommend that it be removed, or clarification provided as to how this review meets the inclusion criteria.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Inconsistency in the Shepperd 2003 reference (year).

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. The authors indicate that no language limits were applied during the search strategies. Describing the methods used for review of articles published in languages other than those in which the authors are fluent would provide the readers additional confidence in the search process.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.