Reviewer's report

**Title:** Improving interpersonal care behaviour in primary care physicians: A systematic review of the efficacy of patient based feedback and/or brief problem-based skills training.

**Date:** 26 February 2008

**Reviewer:** Damin Si

**Reviewer's report:**

This systematic review synthesises evidence regarding the effectiveness of the feedback of patient assessments and/or brief training on interpersonal care behaviour of doctors in primary health care settings. This is an interesting and important topic. Positive interpersonal exchange between doctors and patients is a necessary component for high quality care. Improved interpersonal care will enhance involvement and engagement of patients in clinical care and self-management, an essential element in achieving good outcomes for patients.

Minor essential revisions:

1. **Abstract:** the conclusions state “possible reasons for the lack of positive outcomes are considered and key areas for future research are outlined.” This statement is not informative to a reader. Suggest the authors to provide relevant key information.

2. **Page 12 results:** the authors described that 93 studies were excluded at the full-text review stage. Reasons for exclusion have been provided for 28 of those excluded studies in additional file 2. What are the reasons for exclusion for the remaining 65 studies? Please clarify.

3. **The second paragraph on page 13:** the reference for the Dutch study is missing.

4. **The first paragraph on page 14:** in Table 5, with regard to Grego’s study, description of interventions 1 and 2 is largely identical. What are features of the additional group discussion undertaken in intervention 2? For Wensing’s study, description of the control group appears incorrect. It seems that there was no feedback delivered to the control group for the evaluation purpose.

5. **The second paragraph on page 15:** Insufficient data is not a strong reason for not doing a meta-analysis. More appropriate reasons might include heterogeneity in terms of settings, interventions and outcome assessments.

6. **Page 15 results:** Greco’s and Evans’ studies reported positive effect sizes, but it appears that neither study made adjustment for clustering (see Table 7). There is a risk of overestimating statistical significance when analysing patient level data without adjusting inherent clustering in the study. This point needs to be spell out and interpretation of the results should be cautious.
7. The second paragraph on page 18 duplicates the previous paragraph and should be deleted.

8. In the last paragraph on page 18: the authors only speculate about low level of physician interpersonal skills in 1980s. This speculation only offers limited value in understanding mechanisms of training that affect physicians’ interpersonal care behaviour. It would be more useful that authors include some theories to increase the explanation power.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**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 I have no competing interests