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.

Version: 1 Date: 23 April 2008

Reviewer: Michel Wensing

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General comments

This systematic review concerns RCTs of patient feedback to improve interpersonal care behaviour in primary care. It identified 9 studies, which are described in narrative way. The paper is concise and well written.

I have some general concerns:

1. Interpersonal care behaviour is not clearly defined and potentially very broad. For instance, did it cover risk communication and shared decision decision making (the more cognitive side of communication)? Did it include patient education on disease specific items (e.g. how to use specific medication)?

2. Patient feedback is also broad. The paper only refers to feedback given outside the delivery of care (e.g. feedback given by a patient in a consultation), which should be said explicitly.

3. Only feedback to physicians was considered, but a increasing part of primary care is provided by nurses. Why was this focus chosen?

4. Relatively recently the following review was published: Evans RG, Edwards A, Evans S, Elwyn B, Elwyn G. Fam Pract. 2007 Apr;24(2):117-27. Assessing the practising physician using patient surveys: a systematic review of instruments and feedback methods. (This publication was not cited.) How does the paper relate to this published work? Why is another review needed?

Specific comments

5. Experience shows that errors are easily made in the abstraction of data from studies, but I am not able to check all the tables. I looked at my own study and the description seemed to be alright, except that we had in fact other outcomes in our trial (table 2, last column): video taped consultations and physician questionnaire data on practice management. This might be an error in table 2, except if only patient reported data were included.

6. The discussion section repeats one paragraph twice; this should be corrected.