Reviewer’s report

Title: A systematic review of shared decision making interventions in chronic conditions: a study protocol

Version: 2 Date: 28 December 2013

Reviewer: Emmanuelle Belanger

Reviewer’s report:

The systematic review described in this protocol has many strengths. It tackles a very important topic for many stakeholders. I agree with the authors that a broad definition of SDM is warranted given the evolution of the concept in research in the past. The authors acknowledge the limitations involved in tackling such a broad disease category as chronic conditions. This review will undoubtedly yield many publications increasing our knowledge about the many outcomes of the various types of interventions promoting SDM in the care of chronic conditions. I am looking forward to reading the resulting articles.

Major Compulsory Revisions

I do not have any major compulsory revisions to request.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) Please reformulate the background section to clearly state a research question and provide some hypotheses in terms of the impact of SDM on different possible outcomes

To my knowledge, a literature review is considered systematic if it is guided by a research question and if the processes of identification, selection, appraisal, and synthesis of the literature are explicitly described. All of these steps are clearly delineated except for the research question.

2) Please provide more information about the use of focus groups in the review process

Only one sentence refers to this, in the first paragraph of the section entitled “Analysis”: “Focus groups of patients with chronic conditions, clinicians, policy makers, and researchers, will rank the outcomes based on their perceived importance”.

It is unclear how this will be done and integrated in the review process. How many focus groups? Why focus groups as opposed to other methods? Could previous research be used to accomplish this, instead of generating new qualitative data?

3) Minor corrections:
Background section, paragraph one:

There are types of cancer that do not fall into the category of non-communicable diseases (e.g. cervical cancer). It would be more accurate to say “most cancers”.

Reference numbers should be inserted consistently before or after commas.

The first sentence of the first paragraph in the section “Data Collection” would be clearer if it were reformulated: “We will extract which outcomes were measured in each study, when the outcomes were measured, the estimates of effect for those outcomes and their associated errors”.

I believe there is an apostrophe missing in this sentence: “Publication bias will be assessed by plotting the trials estimate of effect by the inverse of its standard error using a funnel plot.”

Discretionary Revisions

1) The manuscript states that the target of interventions included will be patients, clinicians, or both. If you find interventions including caregivers, would you consider including them?

2) “For any process part of this systematic review where two reviewers are involved, agreement will be measured using the kappa or phi statistics”. I would encourage the authors to also describe the process of analysis thoroughly. Although it is less of a problem in a classic meta-analysis, too often in systematic reviews we are told that authors agree without knowing in depth how the data was integrated.

3) Food for thought for the authors as they carry out this work: I would finally like to suggest that this systematic review will be an excellent opportunity to reflect upon and perhaps advance the conceptualization of SDM in the context(s) of chronic conditions. Chronic care often involves long-term therapeutic relationships, as well as decisions that are periodically revisited and that involve more than the patient-physician dyad. In addition, as a result of my own work, I am becoming more critical of the notion of pre-existing patient preferences (for both decision roles and specific therapeutic options). It has been documented that these preferences are in fact labile and malleable, and that they tend to be constructed during decision-making interactions.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.