Reviewer’s report

Title: Towards a patient journey perspective on causes of unplanned readmissions using a classification framework. Results of a systematic review with a narrative synthesis.

Version: 0 Date: 14 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Jenni Murray

Reviewer's report:

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As the authors have clearly identified, the topic of avoidable and unplanned hospital readmissions is highly important and studies that seek to provide clarity on the causes should be of value. However this paper fails to deliver in terms of both the methodology and therefore the conclusions.

My comments are as follows:

The introduction lacks key reference to support statements for lines 65 to 66 and 68. Specifically the statement regarding 25% of unplanned readmissions not being related to hospital care.

Lines 71, and lines 75-77 don't make sense.

Line 83 - please explain why studies using patient record review were used.

Methods

This is where the manuscript states to become very confusing. The 2017 review that they refer to is in figure 1a I think and it is labelled as 2018. Is the 2017 review published? Does the current review represent an offshoot of the earlier review ie it does not have its own search strategy? I'm not clear on why the PRISMA for the earlier review is even reported here - it doesn't make sense. Figure 1b states that the included studies were qualitative- do they mean observational? - only 12 of the identified studies included interviews with patients so I am
assuming they don't mean qualitative. They do not mention study type as an inclusion criterion but according to the PRISMA that seems to be quite important. What actually worries me most is that the methods for identifying the both the studies on causes of readmissions and the intervention studies all derive from one search - this is not appropriate.

I'm not really sure why a figure is need to report the selection criteria - it seems excessive.

Line 105 - The authors say that they aimed to explore the interventions which were proposed / developed by the authors (in the included studies). This is very unusual methodology for identifying intervention studies - this is not systematic, most likely not robust and is not shown in the PRISMA flow diagram.

Figure 1b reports that 22 studies were excluded - this should be 32.

Table 2 - could the authors report the mean and age ranges of study populations and could they check that the final 2 columns for references 14 - 32, which are completely blank, are not just missing data.

12 studies reported conducting interviews with patients - it's not clear if this data was included in the current review.

The intervention section in the results - Unsurprisingly, because of the lack of robust methodology for this part of the study, the authors only refer to 5 studies. What they identify as 55 interventions are equally regarded as intervention components and if the authors had performed a dedicated search for this part of their review, they would have been awash with a sea of interventions, particularly relating to transitions, that aim to reduced (avoidable) readmissions. The limited data obtained by the authors make this part of the study almost pointless providing spurious conclusions that interventions lack details about the role of patients and community services.

Line 257 - the authors say that all studies were conducted in the hospital. This is a finding that should be reported in the results section of the paper.

Lines 256-259 The authors state that the causes of readmissions depends on the context of the study…BUT all studies were conducted in the hospital so how can they therefore comment on the influence of the study context (setting)?

Line 258 - 'the last studies' …which studies?

Line 258 - The authors state use the phrase 'the majority of readmissions'. As far as I can tell the review doesn't provide data on rates of readmissions so how can they use this phrase.

Line 264 - this sentence doesn't make sense
There are several words missing and grammatical errors in sentences throughout the manuscript. Finally and unfortunately, I'm not really sure what this study adds to existing knowledge. We already know that unplanned hospital readmission are multifactorial and complex in cause and that causes can be due to post-discharge care and self-care.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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