Reviewer's report

Title: Evidence of what works to support and sustain care at home for people with dementia: a literature review

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Reviewer: Daniel Kopf

Reviewer's report:

The authors present a systematic review on the effectiveness of services and interventions aimed at stabilizing care at home for demented patients. Owing to the heterogeneity of services that have been developed, the number of individual studies is very high and the study designs and endpoints are diverse. Thus, it is almost impossible to review the evidence on the basis of individual studies. The authors try to overcome these problems by focussing mainly on previous reviews and metaanalyses rather than on individual studies.

With this „meta-review“ approach, the authors manage to give a very well structured overview addressing the most relevant fields of interests in a specific manner. The review is clear and well written and describes a well-defined literature search strategy.

Major comments:

1. Usually reviews generalize – at the expense of less attention to specific strengths of individual studies. The major limitation of the present meta review approach is that it leads to an even higher level of abstractness and generalization. As a consequence, conclusions and recommendations tend to be somewhat blurred. In areas where a great body of evidence exists with mixed results it is hard to draw meaningful conclusions if reviews are reviewed. This may be one reason why the authors find inconclusive evidence and lack of scientific information in almost all fields addressed. This is even true for areas of research where many studies are available, e.g. in the fields of cognitive interventions and of physical training. The purpose of a review in the face of conflicting results is to define circumstances, conditions, types of interventions and endpoints which are associated with positive vs. negative findings.

2. As this review is intended to supply health planning authorities with information needed to establish helpful networks for care of dementia patients at home, it may be helpful to enrich the general analysis of this review with examples of very well conducted studies and to describe features of interventions that – performed in the appropriate setting – have a high potential success.

3. In fields where no conclusive evidence is available, it may be helpful for researchers to make suggestions on specific questions to be answered, on relevant endpoints and on appropriate settings.

Minor comments:

1. Some abbreviations are not clearly defined, e.g. BME, ICT
2. The authors think that short hospital stay is an important goal. This may be true in many but not all circumstances. Recent evidence suggests that patients with dementia are released from hospital earlier than cognitive normal controls and are less frequently offered rehabilitation. In addition, a short hospital stay may incur a high density of diagnostic and therapeutic interventions within a short period of time. This may be detrimental to patients with dementia.

3. The issue of delayed hospital admission secondary to atypical presentation of serious medical conditions is not mentioned.

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.