Reviewer’s report

Title: How to achieve the desired outcomes of advance care planning in nursing homes: a Theory of Change

Version: 0 Date: 21 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Anouk Overbeek

Reviewer's report:

This article deals with an interesting and relevant topic. The authors provide the first comprehensive rational of how ACP is expected to work in nursing homes. In general, this is a well-written, well-organised and well-illustrated article. I have the following queries / comments which might be worth considering:

Abstract:

1) The aim of the study as described in the background section is as follows: "To develop a theory that outlines the hypothetical causal pathway of ACP in nursing homes, i.e. what changes are expected, through which processes and under what circumstances." The conclusions, however, are dealing with a Theory of Change map. Therefore, what was the aim of the study? To develop a theory or a Theory of Change map? This needs more clarification.

2) Methods: Please provide more information on the Theory of Change approach and its relation to the Theory of Change map.

3) Results: It is not immediately clear whether the long-term outcomes are a result of the analyses. This should be clarified.

Introduction:

4) Lines 5-7: Why is Advance Care Planning (ACP) relevant for frail older adults WHO LIVE IN NURSING HOMES? In my opinion, it would be better to describe that ACP is relevant for frail older adults considering their unpredictable and prolonged dying trajectories characterised by multiple cognitive and functional limitations. In a second sentence, you can describe that many of them live in nursing homes. Please provide numbers / percentages as well. If the authors do think ACP is especially relevant for frail adults WHO LIVE IN NURSING HOMES, please elaborate on this aspect in the manuscript.
4) Reference 10 is from 2005, if possible, please provide a more recent percentage.

5) Lines 10-13: Please add some numbers / percentages; how many frail older people have completed an advance directive in Belgium? How many nursing homes have included ACP as part of their overall nursing home policy?

6) Lines 18-20: In the study of Korfage et al. (reference 22), facilitators are not EXTERNAL healthcare professionals. Facilitators are employed by the care organisation where the intervention is conducted. Please rectify, also in the discussion.

Methods:

7) Line 73: Please write out "GPs" since it is the first time this abbreviation is used.

8) I miss some information about the contextual analysis in both the methods section and the findings.

9) Please add some more information about the recruitment of stakeholders. For instance, have they been invited via letters or via the telephone?

1) Findings:

10) How many stakeholders have been approached vs. how many participated?

11) Ceiling of accountability: Please be more concrete: How much of the effect can be contributed to ACP?

12) Lines 157-160: The authors provide some examples of preconditions. Please write preconditions out.

13) Line 194: What is the reason for using the term "ACP reference persons"? I think "facilitator" is more common and recognisable for people who are familiar with ACP. Be consistent in using one term.

14) Lines 236-237: Who are "they"?
15) Lines 242-243: The authors describe that several follow-up ACP conversations are organised when circumstances change. Please provide at least one example.

Discussion:

16) Line 301: "Morrison et al." is not an intervention, please describe the intervention that has been conducted in this study.

17) Please add a discussion concerning the generalisability of the findings; can these be generalised to other countries? And why (not)?

Figure 1:

18) Intervention "6E" is not described in the legends.

19) Intervention "9" is described in the legends, but not represented in the figure.

20) For a complete overview, please also include assumptions in the figure.

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

Yes

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

Yes

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:

Acceptable

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Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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