Reviewer's report

Title: Effects of dog-assisted therapy in adults with dementia: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Version: 0 Date: 27 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Martino Belvederi Murri

Reviewer's report:

The present meta-analysis examines the effectiveness of dog-assisted interventions for patients with dementia. This area of research is extremely important, both for society and clinical settings. The review seems adequately conducted and reported. The authors employ the GRADE system to rate methodological quality.

In my view, however, the main problem of this study lies in terms of originality/timing. As the authors rightly point out, two other systematic reviews (one with meta-analysis) have been recently published on this topic, but with a slighter larger focus (not just dementia, not just dog-assisted). The first included over 30 studies, this one only ten.

Another problematic issues are the following:

- Since the number of existing studies is quite small, the authors have pooled results from both RCTs and quasi-experimental studies. Although this is a relatively common practice, it remains unclear how the results should be interpreted.

- The authors state they excluded some studies based on the issue a) they couldn't get the full text of the article. I deeply sympathize with this problem (as any researcher I also had to face it at some point), but it remains an important source of bias b) I can't find any statement indicating the authors have tried to get access to data that wasn't published (e.g. data for the subgroup of patients with dementia). Failure to do so also results in an important source of bias.
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.

Yes

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

No

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.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
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Acceptable

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