Author’s response to reviews

Title: Telehealth in Palliative Care is Being Described But Not Evaluated: A Systematic Review

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

Re:

PCAR-D-19-00097

Telehealth in Palliative Care is Being Described But Not Evaluated: A Systematic Review
Sophie Hancock; Nancy Preston; Helen Jones; Amy Gadoud
BMC Palliative Care

We would like to thank you for sending this manuscript for review and considering publication. We acknowledge all of the reviewers’ comments and feel many of them have helped to develop this paper. Please find below point by point response to reviewers’ comments and we have provided an updated manuscript on the online portal.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Sophie Hancock
Technical Comments:

1. Please note the abstract must include the following separate sections:
   Background: the context and purpose of the study
   Methods: how the study was performed and statistical tests used
   Results: the main findings
   Conclusions: brief summary and potential implications
   Trial registration
   Above included.

2. Please note that all manuscripts must contain all the following sections under the heading 'Declarations':
   Ethics approval and consent to participate
   Consent for publication
   Availability of data and material
   Competing interests
   Funding
   Authors' contributions
   Acknowledgements

If any of the sections are not relevant to your manuscript, please include the heading and write 'Not applicable' for that section.

Above included.
3. Please rename ‘Authorship’ to ‘Authors’ Contributions’
Completed as requested.

4. Please rename ‘Declaration of conflicts’ of interest to ‘Competing Interests’
Completed as requested.

5. In the 'Funding' statement, please declare the role of the funding body in the design of the study and collection, analysis, and interpretation of data and in writing the manuscript.
Completed as requested.

6. We note that you have not included an acknowledgements section. If you have no acknowledgements please put ‘Not Applicable’ in this section.
Completed as requested.

7. Please provide a list of all the abbreviations used in the manuscript. This list should be placed just before the Declarations section. All abbreviations should still be defined in the text at first use.
Completed as requested.

8. Please move all Tables/Figures to the end of the manuscript after the references. Provide figure titles/legends under a separate heading of 'Figure Legends' after the References. If Figure titles/legends are within the main text of the manuscript, please move them.
Completed as requested.

9. Figure files should contain only the image/graphic, as well as any associated keys/annotations. If titles/legends are present within the figure files, please remove them.
Completed as requested.
10. Figures should be provided as separate files, and each figure of a manuscript should be submitted as a single file.

Completed as requested.

Reviewer reports:

Eileen Furlong (Reviewer 1): Thank you for your paper which addresses the important topic of Telehealth in Palliative Care with one primary objective and two secondary objectives. The Systematic Review is registered with PROSPERO.

Some questions/comments for consideration: In light of the objectives of your paper I suggest you reconsider your title

Thank you for your comment however we feel that the title makes reference to our objectives however if you would like to be more specific we could revisit this.

Pages 2, 3 & 4: Background literature needs more critical appraisal.

We have made some minor adjustments to the background section, however if the reviewers feel this section needs to be addressed further, we welcome specific comment.

Page 4: Line 37: Did the authors use the same search terms as the 2010 review?

We have revised this section making it clear that all search terms from the previous review were included.

Page 6: Lines 4 - 27: Did the authors adapt each of the five databases and were Boolean or Truncation used? I suggest Telehealth be broadened to mhealth; internet health; electronic health. Was the grey literature screened?

Search terms were adapted to the five databases accordingly. The grey literature was searched-please refer to the description given on page 6.

Page 6: Line 34: Why were you not able to access full papers

This refers to abstracts not being published as full papers hence exclusion. We have made this clearer in the manuscript.
Page 7: Line 4: Identify Wallace et al's criteria for critical appraisal in an appendix. This will also assist the reader with your Overview of Quality section on Page 9 and the rationale for your scoring.

Thank you- we have added the original criteria outlined by Wallace et al in Appendix 1.

Page 9: Line 8-14: You state 'low' sample sizes, but this could be appropriate to method.

We agree that smaller sample sizes in qualitative methodology may be expected and have now referenced this in this section (now page 7).

Page 17: Line 16: All home telemonitoring studies required patients to input specific data....How was this inputted? Line 23: Were patients provided with equipment.

Thank you for this comment however we feel we have addressed this point in the paragraph-please refer to sentence ‘This required patients to input data using their telephone landline, their television or using computer hardware and software provided to the patient for this purpose.’

Lines 54-59: Why are cost implications brought in under section addressing Types of telehealth interventions?

Thank you for this comment- the authors have added a new section to address this point.

Page 18: Line 7&8: Expand on sentence which states that results of studies were generally positive.

Thank you- we have added additional wording in this section to clarify this point.

Page 20 & 21: The discussion section could be enhanced with greater engagement with the literature and linking in the Digital Service Standard.

Thank you- we have made greater comment on the service standard including noting that it has been updated in July 2019.

Pages 23 & 24: Some minor errors in referencing format

Thank you- the references have now been reviewed and formatted Vancouver style as per author instructions.
Natalie Katrina Bradford (Reviewer 2): Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript that report a systematic review of telehealth in palliative care. I offer the following comments and suggestions in my review.

This review provides an update from an earlier 2010 published review of studies restricted to the UK context. The protocol for this review has been registered with PROSPERO and the review is mostly reported according to the PRISMA guidelines. The search strategy appears appropriate.

Introduction- general comments: Some sentences are long to read (as a general rule, a max of 20-25 words helps the reader to easily grasp the content of a sentence).

Thank you, we have reviewed this section and reduced sentence length where possible to accommodate ease of reading.

Some sentences are not supported by appropriate references. For example, the statement, "Supporting patients with palliative care need to access services in the community and avoid hospital admission requires increasing input and support by community general and specialist palliative care services." a reference here would be helpful.

Thank you- appropriate reference has now been added to the manuscript.

Reference is made to the UK digital service standard in the introduction and the discussions and it would be helpful for the reader for this to be briefly summarised.

Thank you, additional detail has now been added to the introduction section regarding the digital service standard.

Methods: The methods of the review appear appropriate. Greater explanation could be provided regarding how data were extracted and how assumptions and simplifications were made.

We have added detail regarding details of the data extraction form used by the reviewers.

In the PRISMA flow chart, there are two studies excluded for being the wrong study design. Earlier in the manuscript the authors state that all study designs, including case studies were included; please clarify this discrepancy.

Thank you for this comment- the studies excluded were editorial/opinion pieces which were excluded as per methodology inclusion criteria.

The results, discussion and conclusions are justified