Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementation of the Milestones Communication Approach for patients with limited prognosis: evaluation of intervention fidelity

Version: 1 Date: 01 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Wendy Gabrielle Anderson

Reviewer's report:

I really enjoyed reading this paper, and feel it is a valuable contribution to the literature. Strengths include:

Great structured approach to a high need situation: interprofessional communication with patients and families about prognosis and goals of care

Involves patients, families and the interprofessional team

Was tested in lung cancer, but has relevance to other cancers (and illnesses)

It is crucially important that we study real world implementation of communication

Used appropriate and effective methods for communication training

Useful to others who may want to implement this approach by describing the intervention and gives other an idea of what fidelity they might expect under similar conditions.

Ways I see that the paper could be strengthened:

Abstract -

Please clarify who delivered the MCAs and what support these people were given to deliver the MCAs. I gather from the manuscript body that three nurse navigators were trained to deliver the MCAs and then their adherence to the practices in which they were trained was assessed by medical records review, but this is not clear in the abstract. The background section can be shortened if needed to provide additional space for this information.

I don't understand the conclusion sentences. I think the conclusion is that for the most part, the intervention fidelity was good. And that further work needs to be done to understand how fidelity could be improved. (As I understand it, there is not information available about what would have improved fidelity, but if there is, please provide it).

Introduction:
Is there data that the Heidelberg Milestones Communication Approach improves patient outcomes? If so please add this information to the introduction. If not, please note in the discussion that this is an important next step in evaluation of this approach.
Methods:

As the manual is only available in German, more information from the manual should be provided in the method section so that others could reproduce this procedure if they wanted to. Specifically, please provide more information about:

- Who did the communication and follow-up calls - it sounds like these were the trained navigators but please clarify.
- What was the involvement of the patient's physicians in the MCs?
- Were any reminders or other supports provided to the navigators to support intervention fidelity?

Results:

Is any information available about the challenges navigators experienced in completing the MCs? Information about what contributed to fidelity and what were barriers to implementing the processes would make this more relevant to readers.

Discussion:

Please provide data to support sentence in the second paragraph "The concept of MCA was well accepted by health care professionals."

Conclusion:

As I understand it, the available data did not speak to the reasons why processes were conducted or not conducted. Thus, please revise the conclusion sentence "Besides reinforcement of the training of health care professionals, it seems important to address the contextual barriers and facilitators for successful implementation of MCA in routine clinical practice." To acknowledge that we don't really know what would improve fidelity, but we should study that, e.g. "Further work should investigate factors that support and detract from intervention fidelity to improve it in the future."
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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Acceptable

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