Reviewer’s report

Title: Process of care in outpatient Integrative healthcare facilities: a systematic review of clinical trials.

Version: Date: 13 September 2014

Reviewer: Sandra Grace

Reviewer’s report:

This paper addresses an important topic and contributes to moving integrative health care from simply being conceptualised as to its nature to being evaluated for its effectiveness. Consistency in the use of terminology and clear definitions for the terms used in this paper will greatly enhance its intelligibility.

Major essential revisions

1. The title and abstract refer to a systematic review of 'all controlled clinical trials of the process of care in outpatient integrative healthcare facilities'. However, this description is at odds with that in the Methods which refers to a systematic review of clinical trials integrating conventional and complementary medicine practitioners in a shared context to administer an individualized treatment plan'. Alignment of the title, aim described in the Abstract, aim in the Methods section, and presentation of the results is required.

2. Introduction

The last line of the first paragraph refers to 'whole system interventions'. This term needs to be clearly defined. (Later, in the Discussion on p14, the authors refer to whole system practitioners'. Who are they?)

A definition of integrative health care is offered in the first paragraph: 'where conventional and complementary medicine practitioners collude in patient care'. The second paragraph then goes on to discuss a number of different definitions. It would be more useful for the reader if discussions of definitions are collated.

In the second paragraph on p4 reference is made to 'adjunctive or complementary and not integrative'. These terms need further explanation. We also need to know why the authors think that it is important to distinguish between these approaches.

In the third paragraph on p4, the authors refer to a 'complex intervention'. The proposal that 'many active components combine to provide outcomes that are greater than a sum of its individual parts' needs further explanation. Alternatively, this sentence could be deleted.

In the last paragraph on p4 the authors refer to 'shared care' and 'shared context'. The difference between these terms needs to be made clear. Alternatively, the authors could choose the most appropriate term and use it
consistently.

Method
On p6, the second paragraph defines 'process' as 'the way in which the health care is delivered - triage, referral, diagnosis, treatment plan and review.' Where is the treatment or intervention in this? From the standard data extraction form, perhaps 'intervention/duration of treatment' should also be considered as part of the process of care.

Results
Results other than those that focused on the authors' definition of 'process of care' are presented, again suggesting a review of the title and abstract to align more closely with the Methods and Results sections of the paper.

If intervention and duration of treatment are considered part of the process of care then the results will need to be reordered. In fact, the description of the study treatment plans in the third paragraph on p8 could be moved to the paragraph on 'Process of care: treatment plan' on p10. The authors may have good reasons for wanting to present the results in the current order but such reasons are not made clear.

The last line of the first paragraph on p12 states, 'The risk of bias of the included trials is low if the difficulty of blinding is considered'. Please clarify this statement, perhaps with reference to Table 3.

Discussion
The discussion section raises some important points but needs more cohesion. Paragraphs seem to jump from one point to point in a disconnected way. Some statements need further clarification. For example, the last sentence in the second paragraph on p13, 'However, consideration could be given to the suitability ... ' needs more explanation. Why do the authors think that such consideration could be given? And again at the end of the second paragraph on p15, the authors say that 'it would be extremely useful to know if IHC models are cost effective'. This sentence could continue with the reason(s) why the authors think this.

In the third paragraph on p14 the authors refer to 'whole system practitioners' (see note in Introduction above). Consistent use of terminology and clear definitions of the terms used in the paper will greatly enhance the reader's understanding.

Minor essential revisions
Abbreviations. Please check the use of abbreviations throughout. The first time a term is used it should be written in full, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. The abbreviation should be used in every occurrence after that. See in particular 'complementary medicine' and 'integrative health care'.

Health care occurs both as 'health care' and 'healthcare'. Either is appropriate but
you need to be consistent.

There are a number of sentences that are written in awkward English or require different punctuation. For example, in the last paragraph on p3, 'a variety of ways, a multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary way'.

In the second paragraph in the discussion the referencing style for Murthy, Sibbritt et al, needs to be changed.

In the second paragraph on p16, the sentence 'These considerations aside, patients are already integrating ... ' needs a reference.

The terms 'conventional medicine', 'allopathic' and 'biomedicine' are all used. Could the authors use one term consistently or use clear definitions of the differences between the terms?

Avoid one sentence paragraphs. On p9, I suggest moving 'The feasibility ....' to the end of the paragraph above. Similary on p10, I suggest moving the sentences beginning, 'The initial assessment ... ' and ' Only one study...' to the paragraphs immediately above.

On p13 last paragraph, replace 'consult' with 'consultation'.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.