Reviewer's report

Title: Assessing the implementability of telehealth interventions for self-management support: a realist review

Version: 1  Date: 19 January 2015

Reviewer: Elizabeth Murray

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this interesting and thoughtful paper. It was a pleasure to read, and I found the ideas immediately compelling, resonating with both other literature in the field and my own experience, while taking the field considerably further forward. I also found it refreshing to read a paper which focused on modifiable factors which are likely to impact on (future) implementations, rather than yet more retrospective analyses of why something did or did not become normalised.

The authors report a study which used a realist review approach to firstly generate theory about factors likely to promote adoption of telehealth, and then to test the theory. It is the theory testing phase which is reported in this paper. The methods chosen were appropriate for the research question posed and were well explained, in a manner which would allow them to be repeated by other researchers. The processes for identifying papers and then extracting and synthesising data were described in detail and appeared robust. Overall, the results were presented clearly, and the conclusions drawn were justified by the data presented. I suspect this paper is likely to be highly influential and highly cited.

I have some comments / suggestions for improvement, most of which are easy to address:

Major compulsory revisions:

1. Please could the authors define “telehealth” fairly early in the background. I think they were using a broad definition of telehealth, as they seemed to be referencing papers which refer to online self-care interventions.

2. It would be useful to have a clearer statement of aims – both the aims of the overall study, and the aim of this paper. At present there are a number of overlapping, but not entirely congruent, statements of aims. Paragraph 1 page 2 refers to “identifying generic structuring factors that should be taken into consideration when developing and deploying telehealth interventions”. Paragraph 2 refers to: “how can telehealth improve the health and well-being of people with LTCs? The final paragraph on page 3 refers to “in this paper we report the theory testing results”. I would find it helpful to have all these brought together in one place, with clarity about which aim / objective applies to which part of the study.
Minor discretionary revisions:

1. Please could the authors add references to some of the statements, e.g. Page 2, 2nd paragraph “telehealth has been found to have a positive impact on...[all sorts of things].” I think this needs multiple references as this sentence includes multiple outcomes and multiple interventions.

2. I find the sentence “Patients, rather than professionals are seemingly most positive about using telehealth” rather opaque. Please clarify – do you mean that patients are more positive than professionals about using telehealth?

3. I looked for references for the three reviews listed at the top of page 3 and could only find 1 reference. Please could the others be provided.

4. I found some lack of clarity in the text on visibility. Is visibility to self also problematic where patients want anonymity? (page 3).

5. Page 6. The explanation of what was meant by personalised seems a bit minimal (name of user, time to take medication, consequences of not doing it). I’m not sure personalisation is the right word for this – and if personalisation is what was meant, could the authors explain this a bit more please.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no financial competing interests.

I have the following non-financial competing interests:
I have worked with several of the co-authors as a co-investigator.