Author's response to reviews

Title: Implementation of improvement strategies in palliative care: an integrative review

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Prof. Sales,

Subject: Revision of paper

We would like to thank the reviewer for her thorough review and useful feedback. We appreciate the opportunity to resubmit this manuscript for publication in Implementation Science. Please find a point-by-point response to the reviewers’ comments below.

1) Can the authors provide clarification/possibly expand on the characteristics of the studies that were not included for further analysis on the basis of design (i.e. not of quasi/experimental design).

The sentence running line 9, page 8 indicates that studies initially identified (i.e. N=112 describing 104 studies) included RCTs, which appears to contradict first sentence of the methods section page 6.

*We agree that we gave the impression that RCT’s did not exist at the start of our search. However, we did identify a few RCT’s. We have therefore deleted the first sentence in the ‘Methods’ section to avoid this contradiction.*

Secondly, we have changed the phrasing of the sentence where we explain that only experimental and quasi-experimental studies were included into: ‘Because of the large number of identified studies, of which many were of low scientific quality and with incomparable outcome measures, only studies with...’ (page 9, line 16-19)

2) The section on "Data extraction and analysis" covers both methods and results regarding study selection, in addition to methods on data extraction and analysis. Methods and results regarding study selection should be separated.

*We agree that the section 'Data extraction and analysis' covered both methods and results. In line with the reviewers comment, we have moved the results to the beginning of the results section.*

3) The study selection (belonging mainly to results section) is not clearly described. "They selected 241 publications eligible for inclusion" (p7-8) could be reformulated indicating that these publications were selected for full text assessment. Further on p. 8: " The final sample included 112..."
publications describing 104 studies." - this is confusing - the final sample analysed consisted of the 12 experimental and 56 quasi-experimental studies.

We have adapted these sentences into: 'Of the 2379 initially identified publications, 241 were selected for full text assessment.' (page 9, line 6-7)

And 'The remaining publications represented a wide variety of research methods and designs: interviews, focus groups, strategy development designs, case descriptions, surveys, process evaluations, RCTs, pre-post test interventions, review papers as well as theoretical papers. Because of the large number of studies identified, and the difficulty comparing and interpreting the results of all these studies, only studies with an experimental (n=12) or quasi-experimental (n=56) study design were selected for further analysis.' (page 9, line 12-19)

4) I suggest that you structure the papers according to the PRISMA checklist. You may leave out the parts that are not relevant, but consider mentioning important aspects not done, such as risk of bias assessment.

Thank you for this suggestion. We have now compared the structure of our paper with the PRISMA checklist and ensured that all parts have been mentioned. Regarding the risk of bias, we have added to the limitations that we did not perform a risk of bias assessment (also see our answer to comment 5 below).

5) Since you are not only describing the different strategies used, but also indicating the effectiveness, I consider it a weakness that you have not assessed risk of bias in included studies, nor the effect estimates. I suggest this should be listed as a limitation in the discussion section.

We have added this as a limitation: '... because it was the aim of this review to provide an overview of strategies used to improve the organisation of palliative care rather than the effectiveness, we did not assess each individual study for risk of bias or effect estimates. The effects of the strategies presented in this paper should therefore be interpreted with caution.' (page 16, line 18-22)

6) In line with this, I suggest that the conclusion focuses on the range of strategies identified, not on the effectiveness of the interventions.

We agree, we have deleted all references to the effects of the included studies from the conclusion.

7) A final minor point: please cite the most recent Cochrane reviews. Some of the Cochrane reviews that you cite have been updated.

We have checked all Cochrane references and have replaced those that have been updated.

Additionally, we have made minor improvements to the text throughout the manuscript. As requested, we have highlighted all changes made in the revised manuscript. We sincerely hope that our changes are satisfactory.

If you need further details on the IMPACT project or the currently submitted paper, please do not hesitate to contact Jasper van Riet Paap.

Looking forward to hearing from you,
Also on behalf of the other authors,
Your sincerely,

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