Reviewer's report

Title: Impacts of information and communication technologies on nursing care: an overview of systematic reviews (protocol)

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Reviewer: Paul Shekelle

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I am having difficulty determining what is the difference between two of their comparisons
ICT vs. no intervention
ICT vs. usual care.

How exactly are these different? What is different about a “no intervention” arm that separates it from “usual care”? If such a study intentionally altered usual care in any way, then wouldn’t it no longer be a “no intervention” comparison?

I also wonder why their primary outcomes are things like nurse satisfaction and their secondary outcomes are things like “patient safety, comfort and quality of life.” I think most policy readers would consider these latter outcomes to be more important than the former.

Their next challenge, as noted already, is the great potential for heterogeneity, even after they have divided this into their 4 categories. So consider their second category, “communication systems” which includes email and texting and telemedicine. Is it valid to group all of these together as a single “domain”? The same concern is also present for their next domain, CDS. There is a large literature on the effects of CDS – both specific kinds of CDS and more broad definitions of CDS – on patient outcomes, and every one I have read notes that there is heterogeneity in effect even within what seems to be fairly similarly – described interventions. Many authorities have hypothesized that a leading cause of this heterogeneity is unmeasured or unreported context and implementation variables. How are these going to be dealt with?

I am very skeptical that they are going to be able to get the kind of specificity they are going to need from the systematic reviews on these topics. I am not sure they are even going to be able to find what they need even by looking at the original studies themselves, but if they have any chance of success that is what I suspect they are going to have to do.