Reviewer’s report

Title: Personal goal-setting among women living with breast cancer: protocol for a scoping review

Version: 0 Date: 14 Jan 2018

Reviewer: Joke Fleer

Reviewer's report:

It is widely recognized that setting and pursuing personally relevant goals provide life with meaning and is of utmost importance for a person's wellbeing. So, I fully endorse the relevance of the topic under investigation, i.e. personal goal-setting among women living with breast cancer. However, my main concern after reading the paper is that it is not clear to me what the authors want to investigate, what questions they want to get answered.

Background

I think the background would benefit from some rewriting. Some suggestions for improvement:

- The first two paragraphs could be integrated. Furthermore, in these paragraphs the authors focus on patient-centered care and write several sentences on it, but basically only one (part) of those sentences is relevant in the context of this paper, i.e. the sentence in which they link patient-centered care to the goal system. I would suggest to rewrite the part on patient-centered care, by giving a short definition of patient-centered care and then more clearly explain why and how the goal system is relevant in the context of patient-centered care.

- Personal goals are things a person wants to achieve, maintain or avoid. It is now written as if people only have approach goals, but people also have other types of goals ('maintain good health', 'avoid getting nauseous from chemotherapy'). I think this nuance needs to be described.

- In line 86-87 the authors state that effective, existing goal-setting interventions for women with BC need to be identified. If you want to achieve that, I would think you need to identify existing and commonly used interventions that incorporate goal setting as an intervention technique, irrespective of whether they have been used in breast cancer or other types of cancer. So, investigate to what extent Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindfulness, etc. etc. use these techniques. Why did the authors not choose that approach?
- In line 92/93 the authors write that they are only interested in breast cancer, without giving a clear argument on why they only want to focus on this type of cancer. Do they expect goal setting (interventions) to be different for breast cancer patients then for other types of cancer? Or is the decision practical, in that it would be too wide a scope for the review to include all types of cancer?

- The objective of the review, as described in line 97-99, is much broader than I expected based on the background. Based on the background I thought the authors wanted to investigate the use of personal goal setting in interventions, but when I read the objective and aim 1, it seems that the authors want to give an overview of all empirical studies (also descriptive) on personal goal setting. That is a very different aim.

- Aims 3 and 4 don't follow logically from the background either. Why would you want to focus on the instruments used to assess goals if your primary aim is to provide an overview on goal-setting interventions?

Overall, I think including all four aims is way too much for this systematic review, especially because they differ widely. I would suggest to narrow the focus and describe findings comprehensively. Furthermore, link the background to the research aims!

Methods

When I read the methods section, my main concern was that the authors want too much. E.g. Why include all outcomes and not only focus on psychological outcomes, which would be most logical from a theoretical perspective?

Another concern is that the authors state that they want to focus on personal goals, but nevertheless aim to include studies that focus on one or two life domains. Personal goals refer to a person's goal system, including goals in all domains of life. This implies that the authors cannot include studies that focus on only one or two domains of life. Studies on treatment goals should be excluded (which is the major bulk of literature in rehabilitation).

Level of interest

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