Reviewer’s report

Title: Comparative effectiveness of the different components of care provided in heart failure clinics - protocol for a systematic review and network meta-analysis

Version: 0 Date: 05 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Shijie Ren

Reviewer's report:

The aim of the systematic review and network meta-analysis (NMA) is to determine which components of care provided in heart failure clinics are the most effective in a reduction in mortality, hospitalization and visits to emergency department and improvements to quality of life.

Abstract: It would be good to mention in the abstract that separate NMA would be conducted for RCT and observational studies.

Interventions: Some of the potential interventional components have been suggested. It is not clear that whether authors would consider different intensity of the components the same or not. For example, for education and counselling if one study had one session on education and another study had 5 sessions. Will these two be treated as the same components?

Comparator: Standard care was listed as the comparator. As there is no restriction in the country in the search. Authors did not discuss the possibility of the standard care being different in different countries. In addition, authors did not discuss whether the standard care could have improved since 1990. It is important to consider these issues in the evidence synthesis.

Outcome: There is a cut off that the outcomes of interest need to be assessed after a follow-up of 30 days or more. But no range was given. It is important to have a reasonable range of follow-up specified to avoid misleading conclusions. Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) using validated measure or a composite end-point of any of these is one of the outcome of interest. It is not clear how different measures of HRQoL could be synthesised.

Setting: It was stated that there will be no restrictions on the type of setting. Authors need to consider whether inventions and standard care delivered in different settings would be different. This in term should have an impact of the design and conduct of the analysis.
Language: It was specified that non-English language articles will be considered. However, in the search it is not clear how non-English language articles will be identified.

Synthesis of results: It was stated that hazard ratio will be estimated for each outcome. Hazard ratio is not the appropriate summary measure for HRQoL. Authors also proposed subgroup analyses for gender, follow-up period, HF severity, method of enrolment and referral. Follow-up period is continuous data. It is not clear how subgroup analyses would be performed as what the subgroups are in this case. It depends on the clinical judgement on whether the settings, country or year of the study would be the potential treatment effect modifiers. Authors could also consider these factors in the analysis of explaining heterogeneity.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal

Were you mentored through this peer review?

No