

F22.013: Measurement of Relationship Quality after Chronic Illness: A Systematic Literature Review

Faculty mentor: Michael McCarthy

Overview

Individuals with chronic illnesses (e.g., heart disease, cancer, stroke) and their family caregivers are often referred to as “care dyads”. The term “relationship quality” describes broadly the extent to which members of a care dyad share pleasurable activities, values, love, and support with one another. A growing body of research suggests that strong relationship quality may be an important protective factor against poor outcomes in both members of the care dyad including depression, low engagement in treatment, and early mortality. However, the measurement of relationship quality across studies and chronic illness populations is inconsistent. This makes it difficult to compare research findings between studies, draw conclusions about the potential of relationship quality for improving outcomes, and, in general, make progress toward the development and evaluation of effective, relationship-focused interventions. A systematic literature review systematically identifies, evaluates, and summarizes the current state of understanding about a topic. The purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic literature review of measures of relationship quality after chronic illness in order to guide research and intervention development efforts, as well as to determine additional research needs.

What the student will DO and LEARN

The student will assist the PI with all aspects of the review. This will include: Finalizing the review questions; developing the review protocol in consultation with Co-I's and a research librarian (i.e., databases searched, search terms used, study inclusion criteria, study quality assessment); registering the review protocol; conducting the search using Zotero reference management software; analyzing the results; and disseminating findings through at least one peer-reviewed research article with a corresponding conference presentation. By doing these activities, the student will learn all aspects of conducting and publishing a systematic review. Typically, the student will learn about chronic illness populations and the important role of relationship quality in maintaining optimal health for both members of the care dyad.

Additional benefits

The student will have opportunities to contribute to the research in a meaningful way that suits their interests. The student will benefit from seeing how this systematic review fits into the PI's larger program of research, in addition to providing immediate insights into an important and emerging social science topic. If interested, the student will be involved in manuscript preparation. The PI will work closely with the student to make sure this I2S experience helps them achieve their educational and/or career goals.

Additional qualifications

Because of the nature of systematic literature reviews, the selected student must possess strong organizational abilities and the capacity to pay close attention to details.

Time commitment

6 hrs/week for 30 weeks