

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form (<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/site/about/resources/checklist.pdf>) and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	Research studies on patients' illness experience using the Narrative Medicine approach: a systematic review
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Fioretti, Chiara; Mazzocco, Ketti; riva, silvia; Oliveri, Serena; Masiero, Marianna; Pravettoni, Gabriella

### VERSION 1 - REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Nunzia Rainone University of Bath, UK
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	12-Feb-2016

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	The paper is interesting and well argued. I suggest to authors to try to describe, in the discussion, what they think about the boundaries of the Narrative Medicine approach. Which are, in their experience, the crosscutting theoretical elements to define Narrative Medicine? This information could be helpful for those younger researchers who wish to start studies in this area, using this literature review.
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Enrica Ciucci University of Florence, Italy
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	13-Feb-2016

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>This study aims to provide a systematic review of the research studies based on a Narrative Medicine approach conducted with patients' and/or their caregivers. The study addresses an interesting topic and it is quite right for publication. I provided specific comments in order to improve the manuscript.</p> <p><b>Abstract:</b> There are two mistakes: Line 3 substitute "this paper aim" with "this paper aims" Line 20 substitute "to implement a met-analysis" with "substituted with meta-analysis"</p> <p><b>I suggest to:</b> Line 4, in the sentence "...studies on patients' illness experience" insert also "or caregivers" because both are considered in the current review. Specify the inclusion criteria in the brief description of methodology.</p> <p><b>Introduction:</b> In the introduction Authors referred to Expressive Writing Intervention (pag. 4 line 23) and Emotional Disclosure paradigm (pag. 5 line 2) without briefly describing the specific methodology.</p>
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	<p>We suggest to do it in order to help reader to better understand them.</p> <p>Methods: As for the first inclusion criterion, it sounds strange to me that authors were looking for the keywords in the title or in the abstract and not in the articles' keywords. In order to improve clarity we suggest authors to specify how they measured the second criterion – research studies, empirical or case study articles considered by authors as studies based on the Narrative approach (p. 6 lines 9-10). What does it mean? That these authors explicitly referred to Narrative Medicine as background for their studies? Please, clarify.</p> <p>I think it would be more appropriate to put in the text the table 1 (now it is cited on pag. 6 line 22) and then the table 2 (now it is cited on pag. 6, line 19)</p> <p>Table 1. It seems to me that the sentence “Authors closely examined the bibliographies of the full-text screened articles to identify any additional possible studies” (pag. 7, at the end of table 1) is not placed correctly in the category “Other exclusion criteria”.</p> <p>Results: It seems to me that there may be errors in the counts shown in Figure 1. If authors removed 234 records from 255 screened records they obtained 21 full texts and not 27. When authors specified the 234 records excluded, adding 86 to 142 do not get 234 Out of 17 records excluded, 10 were excluded because they focused on professionals as sample and the other 7 records?</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Malgorzata J. Nowaczyk McMaster University Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	02-Mar-2016

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>Thank you for asking me to review this interesting paper.</p> <p>This systematic review of the use of narrative medicine approach in the study of patients' illness experiences is timely and competent. It reviews the current literature (up to September 2015) on the use of narrative medicine in this context. The literature review identified ten appropriate publications and the review summarized them concisely yet eloquently. The tables and figure are helpful in following the study design and the body of literature studied.</p> <p>The discussion of the data points out the deficiencies in the analyzed studies and make excellent suggestions for future research such as defining the boundaries of the narrative medicine approach, the differentiation between narrative medicine approach as an intervention and as an analytical tool, and the vast spectrum of the reviewed works as well as the lack of controls in all the reported studies. These are all valid points that should be taken into account in the design of any future studies of the narrative medicine approach.</p>
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## VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

### Reviewer 1

- In response to the first reviewer, we are really grateful for the constructive suggestion proposing us to describe, in the discussion, what they think about the boundaries of the Narrative Medicine approach and the crosscutting theoretical elements to define Narrative Medicine". The reviewer wrote: "The paper is interesting and well argued. I suggest to authors to try to describe, in the discussion, what they think about the boundaries of the Narrative Medicine approach. Which are, in their experience, the crosscutting theoretical elements to define Narrative Medicine? This information could be helpful for those younger researchers who wish to start studies in this area, using this literature review."

As you can find on page 18, line 3, we added some considerations:

"In 2014 in Rome, a committee of international experts in the field participated to a Consensus Conference on recommendations for the implementation of Narrative Medicine in clinical practice [35]. The committee declared to define Narrative Medicine as a methodology of clinical intervention based on a specific communicative competence. Narrative has also defined as a fundamental tool to acquire, comprehend and integrate the different points of view of all the participants having a role in the illness experience. In this sense, the main aim of the Narrative Medicine approach would be that of co-construct a shared and personalized care path [35]. Authors agree with the cited definition and recognize the important role of considering Narrative Medicine as a tool for clinicians daily practice and communication with their patients. In this sense, Narrative Medicine has to be considered as a part of a new broader culture change stressing the importance of a humanization of the care and a personalized Medicine [36,37] tailored and constructed on the individual experience [38], story and needs of every patient."

### Reviewer 2

We are also really grateful to the second reviewer, who gave us many interesting suggestions to improve the quality of our work. Specifically, for the abstract we did the following changes:

a) The reviewer: "Line 3 substitute "this paper aim" with "this paper aims".

Authors: Page 2, Line 3, we corrected "this paper aim" with "this paper aims".

b) The reviewer: "Line 20 substitute "to implement a met-analysis" with "substituted with meta-analysis".

The authors: Page 2, Line 21, we changed with "to implement a meta-analysis"

c) The reviewer: Line 4, in the sentence "...studies on patients'illness experience" insert also "or caregivers" because both are considered in the current review. Specify the inclusion criteria in the brief description of methodology."

The authors: Page 2, Line 4, we changed the sentence "...studies on patients'illness experience" with "on patients' and their caregivers' illness experience".

d) The reviewer: "Specify the inclusion criteria in the brief description of methodology."

The authors: Page 2, Line 7/8, we inserted a brief definition of some of the main inclusion criteria of the review, as requested by the reviewer. We added: "MEDLINE, Psycinfo, EBSCO Psychological and Behavioural Science, The Chochrane Library and CINAHL databases were searched to identify all the research studies focused on the Narrative Medicine approach reporting in the title, in the abstract and in the keywords the words "Narrative Medicine" or "Narrative based Medicine".

e) In the introduction section, the reviewer suggested to briefly describe Expressive Writing Intervention (pag. 4 line 23) and Emotional Disclosure paradigm (pag. 5 line 2) in order to help reader to better understand them.

The reviewer: "In the introduction Authors referred to Expressive Writing Intervention (pag. 4 line 23) and Emotional Disclosure paradigm (pag. 5 line 2) without briefly describing the specific methodology. We suggest to do it in order to help reader to better understand them."

The authors: We made the asked changes (page 4, line 23) added the sentence "This kind of intervention, asking participants to reflect in a written format about negative past life events, aims to improve emotional expression and elaboration of stressful situations improving psychological and

physical health.”. Indeed, the two reported paradigms refer to the same intervention defined by Pennebaker, but the two reviews are related to two different kinds of participants (breast cancer patients versus people with physical or psychiatric disorders).

f) For the methodological section, we really appreciate the reviewer suggestion to better explain how we measured the second inclusion criterion – research studies, empirical or case study articles considered by authors as studies based on the Narrative approach (p. 6 lines 9-10).

The reviewer: “As for the first inclusion criterion, it sounds strange to me that authors were looking for the keywords in the title or in the abstract and not in the articles’ keywords. In order to improve clarity we suggest authors to specify how they measured the second criterion – research studies, empirical or case study articles considered by authors as studies based on the Narrative approach (p. 6 lines 9-10). What does it mean? That these authors explicitly referred to Narrative Medicine as background for their studies? Please, clarify.”

The authors: We changed the text to “To select the most relevant works, we considered just the studies that met at least one of the following criteria: a) articles that reported the words “Narrative Medicine” or “Narrative Based Medicine” in the title, in the abstract and/or in the keywords; b) research studies, empirical or case study articles referring to the Narrative Medicine approach in the background and/or methodological section. This second criterion was due to the need to separate Narrative Medicine studies from studies using narrative methods that were not considered by authors as works about Narrative Medicine [16; 14]. c) Research studies focused on patients or caregivers’ samples. After an initial literature review, the authors decided to include in the review process both intervention programs using a Narrative Medicine approach and research studies using it as a tool to explore patient’s experience of illness.” (page 6, line7-15).

g) The reviewer: “I think it would be more appropriate to put in the text the table 1 (now it is cited on pag. 6 line 22) and then the table 2 (now it is cited on pag. 6, line 17)”

The authors: We placed table 1 at page 6, line 17, following the reviewer suggestion.

h) The reviewer: “Table 1. It seems to me that the sentence “Authors closely examined the bibliographies of the full-text screened articles to identify any additional possible studies”.

The authors: We replaced the sentence “Authors closely examined the bibliographies of the full-text screened articles to identify any additional possible study” in the section “databases” of table 1.

i) The reviewer: “It seems to me that there may be errors in the counts shown in Figure 1.

If authors removed 234 records from 255 screened records they obtained 21 full texts and not 27.

When authors specified the 234 records excluded, adding 86 to 142 do not get 234

Out of 17 records excluded, 10 were excluded because they focused on professionals as sample and the other 7 records?

The authors: We are grateful to the reviewer for suggesting us to check numbers in figure 1. We corrected it after having screened again the identified articles.

Reviewer 3

We are very grateful for the positive comments of the third reviewer which pushed us to deepen our studies implementing new studies in the field.

### VERSION 2 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Nunzia Rainone United Kingdom
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	17-Apr-2016

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	The paper is clear, interesting and well written. The analysis of literature is critical and constructive. I recommend it for publication.
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Malgorzata J. Nowaczyk McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	04-Apr-2016

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	Thank you for this timely and interesting review on research studies using narrative medicine approaches.
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