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Incorporating a systematic review of qualitative studies into clinical practice guidelines on kidney transplantation

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Background: The inclusion of patient perspectives in clinical practice guidelines can promote the applicability and implementation of guideline recommendations. However, most guidelines are still underpinned solely by quantitative trial evidence and there is little guidance on how to incorporate qualitative evidence into clinical practice guidelines.

Purpose: To synthesise and summarise qualitative research on the perspectives of kidney transplant recipients on medicine taking, and to translate and incorporate the findings into the Caring for Australasians with Renal Impairment (CARI) guidelines on prescribing medications for kidney transplant recipients.

Methods: We conducted a systematic review of qualitative studies that explored the perspectives of kidney transplant recipients on medicine taking. Searches were performed in four electronic databases (to April Week 2, 2009) and reference lists of relevant articles.

Results: Five articles were included. The studies focussed on facilitators and barriers to taking medications as prescribed. Facilitators included: survival, fear of dialysis, routinizing, loyalty to clinicians, gratitude towards the donor, taking responsibility, avoiding embarrassment and guilt; and barriers included: healthcare structure, being away from home, unintentional forgetfulness, distressing side effects, unpleasant medication characteristics, complex and changing dosage schedule, poor access to pharmacy services. The findings were expressed as suggestions in 6 domains: patient-professional communication and shared decision making, clinician awareness and conduct, patient education, psychosocial care, resources for managing medications, and improving medication properties.

Discussion: Qualitative research on patient perspectives on medicine taking can help facilitate better patient-professional communication, improve clinicians' understanding on patients decision-making processes in medicine taking, inform patient education and counselling programs, and identify ways to improve medications. Incorporating patients' perspectives into guidelines is needed to ensure that guidelines reflect patient-values and this can indirectly promote patient-centred clinical practice.