Exploring the utility of Self Determination theory in complex interventions in multimorbidity: A qualitative analysis of patient experiences of the CARE Plus Intervention. (words 4997)

Authors

Dr Marianne McCallum¹
Dr Cindy M Gray²
Dr Peter Hanlon¹
Dr Rosaleen O'Brien³
Professor Stewart W Mercer⁴

Affiliation:

Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, 1 Horselethill Road, Glasgow, UK

Author Addresses/contact details:

1. General Practice and Primary Care, Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, 1 Horselethill Road, Glasgow, G12 9LX

2. Institute of Health and Wellbeing University of Glasgow 25-29 Bute Gardens Glasgow, G12 8RS

3. Department of Psychology Glasgow Caledonian University George Moore Building 70 Cowcaddens Road Glasgow, G4 OBA

4. Centre for Population Health Sciences, Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and informatics College of Medicine and Veterinary medicine University of Edinburgh Old Medical School
Corresponding Author:

Centre for Population Health Sciences,
Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and informatics
College of Medicine and Veterinary medicine
University of Edinburgh
Old Medical School
Email: stewart.mercer@ed.ac.uk
Abstract

Objectives

CARE Plus is a primary care-based complex intervention for patients with multimorbidity living in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation. This study explores patients' experience of the intervention and whether Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is useful to understand reported impacts.

Method

Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews of 14 participants conducted during a randomised controlled trial of CARE Plus. Improvement in wellbeing in daily lives following CARE Plus was estimated from participants' accounts of their experiences of the intervention.

Findings

Participants valued the CARE Plus consultations irrespective of perceived improvements. Six participants reported changes in wellbeing that improved daily life, three reported slight improvement (not impacting daily life) and five no improvement. Evidence of satisfaction of the three major SDT psychological needs – relatedness, competence and autonomy – was prominent in the accounts of those experiencing improved wellbeing in daily life; this group also spoke in ways congruent with more self-determined motivational regulation. These changes were not evident in those with little or no improvement in wellbeing.

Discussion
This study suggests SDT has utility in understanding the impact of CARE Plus on patients and may be a useful theory to inform development of future interventions to improve outcomes for patients with multimorbidity.

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**Keywords:**

Primary Care

Multimorbidity

Socioeconomic deprivation

Self Determination Theory

Complex interventions
Introduction

The prevalence of multimorbidity (≥ two long-term conditions) is socially patterned, being more common and occurring at an earlier age in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. In addition, mental health co-morbidity is more common in socio-economically deprived areas which is associated with more hospital admissions, as well as increasing the burden on patients in terms of everyday life. High-quality, accessible primary care that provides relational continuity and patient-centred care is important in managing Multimorbidity. However, general practitioners (GPs) in deprived areas deal with a more problems in shorter consultations compared to those in more affluent areas; managing multimorbidity in such areas can seem like an "endless struggle" to practitioners.

There is a paucity of research on managing multimorbidity, particularly in the context of socio-economic deprivation. Designing and evaluating complex interventions to understand what works in this population is critical. Models for developing interventions, such as the UK Medical Research Council's complex intervention development framework, and the 6SquID model, explicitly highlight the importance of using theory to underpin intervention development; this is also recommended in designing behaviour change interventions for multimorbidity. Nevertheless, interventions targeting people with multimorbidity often lack theoretical underpinning.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation, wellbeing and behaviour change that has been used to help understand how new behaviours can be established, and maintained. SDT has been applied in a wide variety of contexts, including health-related behaviour change, and has recently been shown to be useful for explaining the impact of social prescribing in deprived areas. However, SDT has never, to our knowledge, been used in the context of multimorbidity.
SDT proposes that sustained behaviour change requires satisfaction of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, relatedness (Figure 1). Satisfaction of these needs is necessary for increased “self-determination” in an individual’s actions, which in turn contributes to a higher sense of well-being. Recently beneficence – having a positive impact on others - has been proposed as a fourth psychological need. Self-determination theory describes a continuum of motivational regulation (Figure 1): at one end is amotivation (lack of motivation); at the other, intrinsic motivation (doing something simply for personal enjoyment and interest). In between are various stages of extrinsic motivation: from behaviour motivated by external rewards or punishments, to behaviour fully integrated with a person’s sense of self.

The CARE Plus intervention was a whole system primary care-based intervention targeting patients with complex multimorbidity living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation: its development and optimisation is described in detail elsewhere. CARE Plus aimed to improve patient’s well-being and quality of life by encouraging empathic patient-centred care and relational continuity, and supporting practitioners to focus on identifying patient priorities and setting goals (for practitioners and patients) to support self-management. A phase 2 exploratory cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) indicated likely effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

Although SDT was not used in the development of CARE Plus, one way in which the relational continuity and patient-centred approach to supporting self-management could achieve improvements in patients’ quality of life and well-being is through supporting relatedness, autonomy, competence and self-determined regulation of behaviours. SDT may therefore be a useful theoretical framework through which to analyse patients’ experience of the intervention. This paper aims to explore patients’ experiences of CARE Plus and to investigate the extent to which SDT can be used to understand change in patients’ daily lives following the intervention.
Methods:

Study Design

Secondary analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews with participants who received the CARE Plus intervention collected as part of a process evaluation conducted during the RCT. The trial involved 152 participants and eight practices (four intervention; four control) in areas of very high deprivation in Glasgow, Scotland (trial registration: ISRCTN 34092919).18

Intervention

The CARE Plus intervention aimed to improve the management and outcomes of participants with multimorbidity in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation. It was developed through a co-design process involving researchers, patients, voluntary groups and primary care practitioners, and informed by the existing evidence of managing multimorbidity in this context rather than a single theory.20 It provided the financial resource to allow GP practices to offer longer consultations to targeted participants. The number of consultations was not set in advance, to allow flexibility; on average, participants in the intervention arm received three CARE Plus consultations during the 12-month trial period. The consultations took place with a named practitioner, either GP or practice nurse (PN), to ensure relational continuity.19 Participating GPs and PNs attended three group-based training and support sessions led by a psychiatrist and a senior researcher from the CARE plus team, before and during the intervention. These focused on how to structure consultations to provide a holistic assessment that identified participant concerns and priorities, with a focus on self-management, signposting to community resources if appropriate and the agreement of a care plan with goal setting.19 A self-management pack was also available for the GPs and PNs to give to participants, which contained mindfulness-based stress management CDs, a cognitive behavioural therapy-derived
self-help booklet, material (written and on CD) about the intervention and self-help material (available on request from the corresponding author).

Recruitment and Sampling

Participating practices were asked to identify patients aged 30-65 who had two or more long-term conditions and who their GPs thought would participate in, and benefit from, the intervention. These patients were recruited, consented and baseline data collected prior to randomisation. All participants involved in the CARE Plus intervention were asked if they might be willing to take part in a later face-to-face interview about their experiences of CARE Plus. Those who showed interest were later contacted, given the information sheet about the qualitative study, and gave written consent prior to the start of the interviews. Only participants who had received the intervention were interviewed, and efforts were made to ensure all four intervention practices were represented.

Data Collection

The interviews were carried out by an experienced qualitative interviewer (ROB) guided by an topic guide that aimed to explore participant’s experience of the CARE Plus intervention. Originally the intention was to interview the same participants at two time points after the start of the intervention (three months and twelve months); however, it proved difficult to recruit sufficient numbers of participants who were willing to be interviewed twice. Therefore different participants were interviewed at different time points in their own homes; i.e each participant was only interviewed once. All interviewees received a £30 high street store voucher. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Ethics
Ethical approval was granted by the West of Scotland Research Ethics Service, reference number 11/WS/0031, prior to the start of the trial.

Data Analysis

To structure the analysis and allow comparison between varying levels of change, all transcripts were read independently by two researchers (MM, PH) to assess degree of change in participants’ daily lives following participation in CARE Plus. Degree of change was classified using the Outcome Related to Impact on Daily Living scale (ORIDL), a nine point scale that categorises change after an intervention according to its impact on daily life. The nine ORIDL categories were collapsed to three categories: major/moderate improvement impacting everyday life; slight improvement not impacting everyday life; and no change or deterioration. Disagreements regarding impact were resolved in discussion by two senior authors (CG, SM).

The interviews were analysed using a thematic framework approach. The data analysis was conducted by one researcher (MM), a GP experienced in working in areas of high socio-economic deprivation under the supervision of the senior authors (CG, SM), with expertise in qualitative methods and self-determination theory. A sample of transcripts (n=4) were separately read by four members of the research team (MM, PH, CG, SM) who then met to agree the broad themes (summarised in appendix 1). One researcher (MM) then applied the broad codes, reading all transcripts repeatedly line-by-line. This paper reports on one of the broad themes (experience of CARE Plus: all experience, positive and negative, of CARE Plus within the practice, including patient doctor interaction and experience), which was then coded using the following SDT-based sub-themes:

- Relatedness
- Competence
Finally, a framework matrix\textsuperscript{22} was constructed to compare SDT-based sub-themes across the three ORIDL categories of improvement in participant’s wellbeing in everyday life to examine the extent to which SDT could be used to explain variation in change. NVIVO software Version 11 was used to code and organise data.

**Findings**

Eight interviews were carried out three months after the start of the intervention (to explore the initial impact of CARE Plus): six other participants were interviewed at 12 months (to explore the long-term impact of CARE Plus). Most of the participants (n=8) were female, they were aged between 40 and 63. They had an average of five chronic diseases (range 2-10) and only one did not have at least one mental health co-morbidity. Further details and impact on daily life classification are summarised in Table 1. Six participants described major or moderate improvement impacting on wellbeing in daily life, three described slight improvement that did not impact daily life, and five described no overall change.
Table 1 Demographic and health characteristics and impact on daily life classification of participants participating in CARE Plus interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Number of chronic diseases</th>
<th>Mental health co-morbidity</th>
<th>Time point when interview conducted</th>
<th>Impact of CARE Plus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Major/mod Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Depression, Panic Attacks</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Major/moderate Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Major/moderate Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Depression, Anxiety</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Slight Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Major/moderate Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Slight Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Addiction (alcohol)</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Major/moderate Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Depression, Obsessional compulsive disorder</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Major/moderate Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Slight Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Addiction (cannabis)</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of major/moderate improvement included starting a new regular social support group with friends, going into the town centre after avoiding it for years, or physiotherapy and occupational therapy referral leading to improvements in function, resulting in improved daily activities. Participants in the slight improvement group described changes such as learning basic anxiety management, understanding the link between pain and mood, and learning to use a computer, which were beneficial but without any major impact on daily life.

**Participants’ experiences of Care Plus**

Most of the participants felt the CARE Plus intervention was beneficial and valuable in some way, even if it did not result in major improvement in daily life. Two of the five participants in the no change group did not find the intervention beneficial: Participant 2 (male, 40) reported a pre-existing poor relationship with the GP that did not change; Participant 6 (male, 52) felt a GP was there to deal with ‘medical issues’, did not want to spend more time discussing broader issues and reported finding the CARE Plus consultations ‘awkward’.

Most of the participants reported receiving longer consultations. One participant interviewed at three months, and one at 12 months, reported that their CARE plus experience was similar to their normal experience. Two did not remember receiving the CARE Plus self-management pack (given out by the GP or Practice Nurse) at all, and four had chosen not to use it.

Box 1 summarises participants’ experiences of the key components of the intervention. All the participants who described longer consultations valued them. However, while those in the no change group valued the chance to be listened to they did not feel solutions offered were of use because of current personal or social circumstances. Those in the major/moderate change group, who discussed community referral, appeared to have derived value from this. In contrast,
those in the slight or no change groups who were signposted to community resources cited external factors as reasons why they did not engage. Most of the participants who used the self-management packs described them of being of benefit, particularly the CDs, even if only in the short-term.
Understanding change in participants’ daily lives following the CARE Plus intervention

BOX 1: Patients’ experiences of CARE Plus components

Consultations
Patients in the major/moderate and slight improvement groups felt listened to, and that the extra time allowed them to better understand their illnesses, deal with more than one problem within the consultation and discuss their social context:

“...or you’re struggling with that, you don’t talk about in a normal 10-minute appointment. You’re only in to, to tell her what’s actually wrong with you that day or do, do you know what I mean? That’s what I really liked about that appointment because we sat and we talked about how I felt about it em, you know, like that kind of thing as well.”

Patient 3, major/moderate improvement, three months

Several of the major/moderate improvement group described how the longer consultations had provided the time and space to allow them to identify their problems and set goals around them. They also provided examples of how they had acted on these goals. Those in the no change group who had experienced longer consultations also valued the chance to spend extra time talking about their worries. However, where problems were identified they felt there was no solution due to ongoing symptoms, or social circumstances:

“Depression would go away if you had maybe had something to do or whatever, and then you get these things to do i.e. camera club and that wee exercise club then you start greeting [crying], so you’re no going to go and started greeting [crying] in front of twenty odd people. So you stay in ‘til you think it goes away, right?”

Patient 7, no change, three months

Community referral
Several patients from the major/moderate change group, and one from the slight improvement group, were referred to other health professionals or third sector agencies with positive impacts on their wellbeing:

“we sat and spoke about [local mental health support organisation]. Em, she’s like that now, cos they’ve got all different things in there. So I went there. I did go there. And I really enjoyed it, it was good. I took part in wee groups, relaxation, all different things.”

Patient 13, slight improvement, twelve months

Several patients in the slight and no improvement groups mentioned being signposted, or even referred, to other agencies but they did not engage. Feeling it would not help, or other factors such as transport or finances, were cited as reasons:

“ It’s alright saying ‘go and do these things’ but if you’ve not got the money to go a... ‘cause like I can get eh the Glasgow thing, and you get for half price, but even half price I cannae afford that either because eh finances.”

Patient 5, slight improvement, three months

Self-management resources
Of those who used the self-management pack, the CDs were mentioned as most beneficial. One patient in the major/moderate change group found the CBT booklet really helpful to support her effort to do expand her daily activities:

“Things that I’ve stopped doing because of my condition and then the other part is how you’re going to reclaim your life and try and do things, write dates down that you’re going to do it. I’ve actually did some stuff”

Patient 8, major/moderate improvement, 12 months
Analysis using the SDT sub-themes revealed some key differences in the three group's experience of the three innate psychological needs. These are summarised in Table 2, (motivational regulation summarised in Figure 2).
**Table 2: Summary of the SDT sub-themes across each of the three impact categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relatedness</th>
<th>Major/moderate improvement (n=6)</th>
<th>Slight improvement (n=3)</th>
<th>No improvement (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Good relationships with named practitioner</td>
<td>• Good relationships with named practitioner</td>
<td>• Most had good relationships with named practitioner but two did not (one longstanding poor relationship, one felt “over-friendly”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All had at least one positive and supportive social relationship</td>
<td>• Frictions in social relationships evident (not able to disclose suicide attempt, fights with family members)</td>
<td>• Social isolation an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>• Evidence of developing new skills (using a computer, getting a job) and of these improving wellbeing</td>
<td>• Some evidence of developing new skills (using a computer, recognising walking as a coping mechanism), but these did not appear to impact wellbeing</td>
<td>• Impact of chronic disease and social circumstances identified as insurmountable barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some demonstrated increased compliance of medication because of intervention</td>
<td>• Social circumstances, and to a lesser extent illness, identified as key limiting factors to change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All recognised that competence restricted by their illness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>• Described health behaviours as within their control and identified things they could do to help</td>
<td>• Two felt that nothing would change as their circumstances were outwith their control</td>
<td>• Sense that nothing could be done to change circumstances and that things were outwith their own control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provided examples of changing their circumstances (setting up new support group with friends, using CBT booklet to reduce social isolation)</td>
<td>• One had just referred herself to local mental health team and engaged with local mental health charity, but this had not yet impacted on her symptoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td>• One woman had started a group with friends who had similar health issues</td>
<td>No examples</td>
<td>No examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One man had started to help out with his grandchildren by doing the school run and taking them swimming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Relatedness**

**Patient/practitioner relationships**

All the participants in the major/moderate improvement groups reported good relationships with their named practitioner prior to and during the CARE Plus intervention. Most also felt their relationship had improved as a result of CARE Plus, and valued this improvement:

> “The consultation was more relaxed. I actually felt I got to know the doctor a bit better as well because I was managing to spend more time with him. Sometimes you just go in, tell him your problems, examine you and he says 'that's what's wrong'. But it wasnae like that. I got to......He made me feel more relaxed for some reason. I don't know why.”

Participant 8, (female, 42), significant improvement

One participant in the major/moderate improvement group felt she had a good relationship with her GP but had only seen him once during CARE Plus. She found the CBT booklet in the self-management pack helpful to identify things she had stopped doing because of her symptoms and to motivate her to do them again. She also had a very supportive key worker who had been instrumental prior to the intervention in helping her set goals to increase her physical activity.

One participant in the minor to slight improvement group felt her relationship with her GP had improved during CARE Plus; the other two in this group felt their relationship had not changed but was good to start with. Most in the no change group also appreciated and valued their relationship with their named practitioner, and said the intervention had not changed it. Two described dissatisfaction with their relationship with their GP: one felt he had a longstanding
bad relationship, the other that she was ‘overly-friendly’ with her GP, which stopped her 
confiding difficult things.

“[they] know me too well – what is, in a way, sometimes I think I maybe walk up and I go in 
and then don’t end up telling them what I’m there for.... me and the doctor end up, 
laughing about something and I actually – and then I think, 'No, I don’t wanna talk about 
what I came here for’, which I know sounds really strange”

Participant 11, female, 42, no change, 12 months

For both these participants, the pre-existing relationship with their practitioner prevented them 
from being honest about their problems or following advice during CARE Plus consultations.

Relationships with other people

As the interviews focused on participants’ experiences of CARE Plus, much of the accounts of 
relatedness focused on the participant’s relationships with their named practitioner.

Nevertheless, all participants in the major/moderate improvement group also described at least 
one other important relationship, specifically with a family member or social care professional.

In contrast, the slight improvement group all described having more limited social support, with 
many relationships mentioned appearing to be unsupportive or even obstructive:

“my daughter’s out at work all day right enough but sometimes me and her clash as well 
and that causes anxiety and that, all ‘cause me and her are sometimes fighting and arguing 
and things, and that kinda causes anxiety. But it’s only because she’s really the only other 
adult that I see apart from sometimes if I go round to my mammy. I don’t see any other 
adults”
Most of the participants in the no change group appeared very socially isolated, and the relationships they described were often problematic.

“People say to me ‘god I know how you feel I’m on my own myself’. I says ‘Are you? Did your grandson stay last night?’ ‘Aye’ ‘Did your daughter came over to visit you this morning?’ ‘Aye’. ‘You’re not on your own I’m here 24/7, the door doesnae go, the phone doesnae go, nothing. So I wake up ‘what’s the point of getting up? What’s the point of cleaning up?’ Right so you get up… och I go back to my bed.”

In this intervention poor relatedness either in relationship with their practitioner, or social isolation, appeared to have a particularly negative impact on wellbeing. The narratives of those who experienced major/moderate change appeared to demonstrate a greater degree of relatedness compared to other groups.

**Competence**

Those in the major/moderate improvement group all reported how the goals they had set themselves during the CARE Plus intervention helped them feel more competent (e.g., reducing anxiety by attending self-management classes, learning to use a computer by enrolling in local classes, getting a job).

Several participants who had not been taking their medication prior to CARE Plus started to do so as the consultations made them focus more on their health. For one participant
understanding the difference these changes made in reducing the risk of a stroke (a major worry as her mother had died of one) was a markedly positive achievement:

"she actually phoned me the next day and said to me that, you know em, going through everything my weight and stuff like that blood pressure and things, em that I had actually reduced my chances of having a stroke to 11%, which I says to her 'oh you're joking'. I says to her 'I knew it would reduce it considerably but I didnae think it would be as good as that'. She says 'so that's fantastic'. So I put the phone down and I thought 'oh how good is that!'"

Participant 3, female, 54, major/moderate improvement, three months

All the participants interviewed described negative impacts of multimorbidity on daily life (eg, pain restricting physical activities), and thus how their sense of competence was compromised. However, while the participants in the major/moderate group acknowledged how pain, lack of mobility or low mood impacted their everyday life, they were open to trying new things that might help.

"I can't do it now there's nothing I can do about it and that's it just got to accept it. But there's one thing I can't accept at the moment is not being able to dance and I'm hoping that this [pain clinic] with the pain management em it's eh to be a I think it's a talk group as well. So I'm hoping that maybe they'll come with a few suggestions on how to cope and so I'm going in open minded and I'll take it from there to see, see what happens from there".

Participant 4, male, 51, major/moderate improvement, 3 months

Most participants in the slight improvement group also reported some degree of increased competence as a result of the CARE Plus intervention (e.g. learning to use a computer, new relaxation skills). However, this did not impact on everyday wellbeing. They frequently cited
personal and social circumstances as key barriers. For example, one participant felt psychologically unable to move on from a difficult work situation from over a decade previously. For another, shame and embarrassment related to obesity, angina symptoms, and reduced finances stopped her being able to make any further changes, even when she knew these would help.

“like I’ve got to take a heart spray for my if my, if I’m getting pains in my chest. I do get puffed out dead easy. So I’m not as fit as maybe….a lot of them, some that go to these classes and the lassies are like that (holds up little finger) and it never used to bother me when I was thingmy, when I used to go. I wisnae as heavy ever as heavy as this right enough. And it doesnae bother me to go to exercise classes ’cause I thought ‘well I’m here to help myself and lose weight’ but for some reason now I feel a bit more embarrassed.”

Participant 5, female, 51, slight improvement, three months

In the no change group, the impact of their illnesses and social circumstances were felt to be insurmountable barriers. Most of this group dwelt specifically on poor mental health as a reason for being unable to do things.

“I started going back. But I stopped going recently because of all this greeting (crying) again. I’m, no going to sit in a club and started greeting right. So this em greeting thing really affects me. As I say I can be alright and then I start greeting”

Participant 7, male, 63, No change, three months

All but one of the interviewees had mental health problems, the severity of which was not clear from the interviews. The major/moderate group discussed their mental health in the context of strategies they had used that helped (support from friends, psychological therapies). In contrast
the no change and slight improvement groups tended to focus on what they could not do, and demonstrated a reluctance to try new things.

**Autonomy**

The major/moderate improvement group tended to discuss changes in their behaviours, and to some extent their health, as being within their own control. One woman had started a support group herself after a suggestion from her GP. This had provided her and her friends, with a sense of some control in their daily lives, even though at the time of interview they were waiting to hear if their social security benefits would be reduced.

> "But em as I said to my three friends I said well if we don't get it (financial help) we just need to meet more often and support one another"

Participant 1, female, 59, major/moderate improvement, 3 months

Most in the slight improvement group, and all in the no change, perceived a sense of hopelessness that things would never change, and there was nothing they, or anyone else, could do:

> "To be honest, as I said, I - I just - I suppose it – If there was something they could do for me then yes, it would be, but I just feel there's nothing, you know, out there for them to give me, if you like."

Participant 11, female, 42, no change, 12 months

One participant described how she was in negative equity and deemed low priority for council housing. She was struggling to focus on anything other than this and felt that what would help (accessing social housing, being able to pay off the mortgage) were out with her control. Others cited other external factors such as lack of finances, lack of local facilities or professional
support as key things that made them feel making changes were out with their control. At times this lack of autonomy led to anger and frustration.

“Everything else, you know, is – Nothing has been right for me, and that was me doing what I’m supposed to do and being honest. Do you know what I mean? You’re better being a crook. Honestly, that – that’s why there is so many cos they get away with it all........ I’m paying for it with all the taxes I pay, but they’re wanting to take my sick money off me now”

Participant 9, 55, slight improvement, 12 months

One participant in the slight change group did demonstrate a degree of autonomy: she had attended a local mental health group (after signposting from her GP) and had referred herself to a counselling service. Having previously put her family and friend’s needs above her own she felt she was staring to make positive changes:

“I’m more – more open-minded about myself than I have been in a long long time, long time. It’s what I want now. It’s what I want to do that counts. it’s like basically, right now, it’s baby-steps, one day at a time, and one step at a time and just thinking you’re positive rather than negative, cos my whole life’s just been negative.”

Participant 13, female, 45, slight improvement, 12 months

Where lack of autonomy was demonstrated in participant’s narrative, it appeared to have a negative impact on wellbeing and to be a significant barrier for future change.

Beneficence

Only two participants, both from the major/moderate improvement group, reported changes that related to beneficence (having a positive impact on others.) One was the participant who started a support group on the suggestion of her GP, and the other was a participant whose first
CARE Plus consultation had highlighted his dependent drinking and had motivated him to seek help. He then started helping his daughters by taking his granddaughters to school to give more structure to his days. These activities appeared to be important to both participants and contribute to their sense of wellbeing.

**Motivational Regulation**

Participants' accounts demonstrated examples of motivational regulation from across the motivational continuum shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 illustrates individual motivational regulation, as demonstrated in each participant's narrative, showing any change throughout the intervention.

Participants in the major/moderate improvement group appeared to demonstrate the greatest internalisation of motivational regulation during the CARE plus intervention. One woman described how, prior to CARE Plus, she had increased her physical activity with support from a worker. However, the CARE Plus consultation helped her recognise how she had also stopped doing social things she used to enjoy. She described how after her initial CARE Plus consultation she had started to increase social activities, initially motivated by a realisation she had to get out more even if not enjoyable (introjected regulation). At the end of the interview, she talked of how, three months on, she was now enjoying going to the cinema and shopping, thus demonstrating more self-determined, identified regulation.

"Actually for the first time I was in the town at Christmas time, it was busy, and I enjoyed it and I don’t know why but...I never...If it’s busy I just....I never go in because if it’s busy crowds I just don’t like. It didnae seem to bother me."

Participant 8, female, 42, Significant Improvement, three months
In the slight improvement group, motivational change was less evident and regulation remained situated more towards the less self-determined end of the continuum. The participants in the no change group demonstrated external regulation or amotivation, with no evidence of any change throughout the intervention.

“But I also think the doctors and the nurse have done what they can do, and if not, I know there’s nothing really anyone can do.”

Participant 11, no change

Discussion

This study is the first that we know of to specifically look at SDT in the context of multimorbidity in areas of high socio-economic deprivation, where there is little evidence regarding what helps people with multimorbidity live well\(^9,10,23\). Analysis of qualitative data from patients who had participated in the CARE Plus intervention found that they generally valued the longer consultations with their named practitioner. However, fewer than half of those interviewed appeared to demonstrate changes in wellbeing that improved daily life, and five of the 14 reported no improvements. Evidence of satisfaction of the SDT psychological needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy was prominent in the accounts of those experiencing change affecting daily life; this group showed more self-determined motivational regulation. Thwarting of these needs was more evident in those experiencing slight or no change, with low relatedness having a particularly negative influence.

Strengths and limitations of this study

A strength of this study was the focus on patients living with multimorbidity in areas of high socio-economic deprivation where there have been few targeted interventions or qualitative accounts\(^9,11\). In addition, SDT was not an underlying theory used in the development of the topic.
guide meaning findings were not influenced by interviewer bias. It was part of a broader programme of work (thus allowing it to be placed in a wider context), much of which has already been published.1, 3, 7, 19, 20.

A limitation is that only a small sample of patients were interviewed, and we cannot be sure data saturation was reached. Another is the timing of the interviews, some of which were done at 3 months, some at 12 months. However, this did not appear to influence the progress that had been made (as many patients showed progress at 3 months as at 12 months). A second limitation was that the original researcher (RO'B) who conducted the interviews was not involved in the secondary analysis, although she collaborated in the writing of the paper.

Findings in relation to wider literature

Our findings of patient experience of CARE Plus are similar to those reported by the early pilot work conducted during the design of the CARE Plus intervention, where increased consultation times, continuity of practitioner and referral to community resources were all valued by participating patients.20 Our findings are also consistent with previous work looking at SDT in relation to health behaviours, showing that satisfaction of psychological needs is associated with more purposeful, consistent and sustained health behaviour changes.16, 24

Previous work looking at multimorbidity in areas of high socio-economic deprivation has demonstrated the impact mental health co-morbidity has on wellbeing and the patient’s everyday work.3 The no change group particularly discussed the negative impact of their mental health symptoms. It could be the participants in this group had more severe mental health problems, which could have impacted on engagement with the intervention.
Implications

In RCTs of multimorbidity interventions conducted to date, few have explicitly used theory to underpin the development of the intervention or explain findings. Reviews suggest interventions to improve outcomes in morbidity are likely to be complex, and guidelines on complex interventions point to the importance of theory in the planning of such interventions. Thus, exploring and identifying theories such as SDT to understand the underlying mechanisms of change may help guide future intervention development.

Recent reviews have highlighted the importance of careful consideration on who to target and include in any multimorbidity intervention. The findings from this study suggest some patients were constrained in engaging in behaviour change by their social isolation and, in two cases, a poor relationship with their practitioner. Future interventions may need to be more specific in patient groups targeted.

While the patient accounts in this study suggested SDT was helpful in understanding behavioural change, for some patients’ other (structural) factors were cited as key reasons why they could not make changes. These included lack of finances, poor transport, lack of local (therefore accessible) services (several patients stopped attending clinics when location changed) and housing problems. The importance of ‘upstream’ determinants of health is clear and needs to be addressed by policymakers. Nonetheless, access to effective healthcare is in itself a determinant of health, and SDT may help in the development and delivery of targeted primary care interventions that at least mitigate some of the effects of social inequalities.

Conclusions
The study demonstrates the core constructs of SDT (relatedness, competence and autonomy) were present, and absent, in accounts of patients’ experiences of CARE Plus, depending on the extent to which the intervention had impacted on their lives. Self-determination theory may have utility in the design of future interventions but further research is required to explore this further.

References


