Reviewer's report

Title: Impact of a task focusing strategy on perceived stress levels and performance during a simulated cardiopulmonary resuscitation: A randomized controlled trial

Version: 2 Date: 31 January 2013

Reviewer: Koenraad Monsieurs

Reviewer’s report:

The authors report a randomized study where during an ALS scenario on a manikin, the potential reduction of stress levels by task focusing is evaluated. Additionally, they studied the effect of their intervention on hands-on time, time to start CPR and number of leadership statements.

Non-technical skills such as coping with stress, communication and leadership are thought to be important factors that may influence CPR outcome. The current manuscript therefore touches an important topic which is appealing to the target audience of the Journal.

Major compulsory revisions:

- Reading the abstract, I had difficulty understanding the nature of the intervention. The authors should make it very clear that the intervention is aiming at coping with stress during a resuscitation exercise by loudly asking two questions that should allow the rescuer to focus (again) on the task (what is the patient’s condition and what immediate action is needed). I would suggest the authors rethink how they formulate the methods section of the abstract.

- While reading the results of the study, I do not agree with the conclusions of the authors that stress levels were reduced. On a 1 to 20 point scale, overall stress/overload was reduced by 0.6 points. Although that may be statistically significant, the authors did not consider the clinical relevance which is likely to be insignificant. Also, at no specific time point during the resuscitation exercise a difference in stress level was found (one would expect at least a clinically significant effect during the actual resuscitation event). Therefore, the overall conclusion that the intervention decreased stress levels is not supported by the results. I have no problem with the study being negative, but claiming positive results cannot be supported.

- The study was conducted almost five years ago. If the manuscript has been submitted to another journal previously, it would be helpful to send the comments from previous reviewers to the Editor, for transparency.

Minor essential revisions:

I would suggest the authors consider using the word “coping” which seems to be appropriate to describe the nature of the intervention.

“intervention group” and “control group” and “randomization arm” should be
written without hyphen
Please use uniform spelling throughout (now US and UK is mixed).
What is a “confederate nurse”? Please use other terminology.
Under methods, the authors describe that they used a 10-point Likert scale but in the results a 20 point scale is used. Please explain or correct.
Under results, it is written that the participants were assessed with a CPR knowledge questionnaire. This should be written under methods. Moreover, I could not find the results of this questionnaire.
The discussion should focus more on the results of the study, too much background is given. Also, the paragraph about chronic stress is not really relevant and could be shortened.
Please to not use statements such as “close to statistical significance”. A result is either significant or it is not.
Discretionary revisions: none.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.