Reviewer's report

Title: Treatment of depressive disorders in primary care - protocol of a multiple treatment systematic review of randomized controlled trials

Version: 1 Date: 30 July 2011

Reviewer: Cindy L Lam

Reviewer's report:

My interpretation is that it is a protocol for a meta-analysis of RCT of treatments of depression in primary care although the authors refer to systematic review in some part of the paper and meta-analysis in another. The methods for search and selection of papers, and the statistical methods for the meta-analysis are clearly described standard methods, but there is insufficient details on how outcome data will be pooled together for the meta-analysis, and how the results can answer the research question of "how the available treatment options compare with each other" better than the many reviews that are already available. The results of multiple treatment meta-analysis should be most original and useful but the authors regard it to be exploratory. The biggest uncertainty of the success of this study is whether there are enough good quality studies in primary care to make a meta-analysis meaningful.

Major revision
1. Please state more clearly whether the proposed study is a systematic review or meta-analysis.
2. Please explain more clearly the meaning of the research question "how the available treatment options compare with each other". Does it mean that the study will try to rank the relative effectiveness of different treatments? A more specific and detailed review of the literature on what is known about the effectiveness of each treatment should be provided. There is no mentioned of the Cochrane and NICE reviews on psychological treatments of depression.
3. Explain why trials that compare with placebo or no treatment will be included if the study aim is to compare treatments with each other?
4. Please define the primary outcome measure better, is it the proportion of subjects who responded to the treatment? If it is, please define "responders" more clearly for studies that did not use the HAMD or CGI as the outcome measure including those that used change in depression scale scores as the outcome measure.
5. As explained above, the results of multiple treatment meta-analysis should be most useful in addressing the research question. Therefore, the multiple treatment meta-analysis methods need to be described more fully.

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.