Reviewer’s report

Title: Exercise therapy for Stress-related Mental Disorder, a randomised controlled trial in primary care.

Version: 1 Date: 8 March 2011

Reviewer: Beverley Lawton

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

The hypothesis does not reflect the study. The question they answered was does referral of patient with SMD to a physical exercise programme which has cost attached to it change SF36 scores favourably. It did not seem to but the drop outs cause considerable bias.

A major flaw is that we have no idea whether those randomised did any extra exercise at all and what that was and intensity.

Therefore the conclusion is not warranted – perhaps the researchers could say that referral to physical exercise programme with associated cost had no impact on SMD but even then this is misleading as it assumes some physical exercise may have been done but this is not clear. Usually in these sorts of studies both the control and intervention improve their exercise levels and this is measured in some way.

Are the methods appropriate and well described? NO -No baseline physical activity data taken, no description of intervention – if it was achieved or attended. Why was a questionnaire sent rather than done on phone or in primary care.

In discussion – this is not a trial investigating the contribution of physical exercise to the recovery of stress related mental disorder as we have no measure of physical activity in intervention of control –a significant flaw. The impact of fee for service was not measured. Conclusion does not match results and method

Minor Essential revisions

What is a first line psychologist. Is this primary care based. Patients identified in primary care and then sent a questionnaire and invite from GP.? Any other contact from primary care. Why were active patients included?

Results Para 2 .Are the percentages correct – 152 were randomised – 56 in control group which is 37 not 61% of those randomised –check others as well. Again next para of the 102 randomised patients- there were 152 randomised – need to clarify . Check drop out percentages 65 % Is this correct Or should it be 57%. First para discussion cannot comment on effect of exercise on social functioning as its not known if they did any. It may reflect they are poorer after paying for intervention which can make you feel worse.
In discussion – this is not a trial investigating the contribution of physical exercise to the recovery of stress related mental disorder as we have no measure of physical activity in intervention of control – a significant flaw. The impact of fee for service was not measured.

Repeat Conclusion does not match results and method

More up to date refs for example below and others

Consort diagram should have number randomised somewhere (152)


**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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 interest