Reviewer's report

**Title:** Usefulness of C-reactive protein testing in acute cough: an open cluster-randomised clinical trial with CRP testing in the intervention group

**Version:**2 **Date:** 26 October 2013

**Reviewer:** Matthias Briel

**Reviewer's report:**

Major compulsory revisions

1) Good that the authors now mention the Chi squared test in the methods section. However, as mentioned previously there are imbalances between groups at baseline with prognostic relevance for antibiotic prescribing (specifically in the proportion of community acquired pneumonia (17% vs 7%) and the perceived preference for antibiotics by patients (10% vs 23%)). Randomization safely achieves balance of prognostic factors with about 500 patients per group and more. Therefore it is not a surprise that there are some imbalances with a total of 179 patients randomized. I strongly recommend conducting a multivariable regression to examine the effect of the experimental intervention on antibiotic prescribing adjusting for CAP and perceived preference - at least as a sensitivity analysis. Otherwise the results will not be valid.

Minor essential revisions

2) I think it is insufficient to say "Due to the open design this evaluation was not blinded, and the results should be interpreted with caution." - I would suggest that you explicitly say that "GPs were aware of the purpose of the trial, they recruited and treated patients, and assessed the clinical outcome together with patients in an unblinded fashion and without standardized criteria."

3) To avoid misunderstandings I would add to your statement "Regrettfully we miss data on the duration of illness": "...at randomization".

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.