Reviewer’s report

Title: Outcome and patients’ satisfaction after functional treatment of acute lateral ankle injuries at emergency departments versus family doctor offices

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Reviewer: Sita M Bierma-Zeinstra

Reviewer’s report:

This paper as it stands, presents the patient satisfaction after functional treatment of acute lateral ankle injuries. Whilst it is important to shine light on the patient satisfaction of different treatment strategies, I have some serious concerns about the presentation and analysis of the results and, consequently on the outcome and interpretation of this study.

The writing can certainly be improved, perhaps an English native speaker can be consulted?

Further, one of my major concerns is the contrast between both intervention groups. Both groups received the same treatment, the only difference is that one intervention group visited the GP and the other visited the ER once. So what is the reason that you expect a difference in patient satisfaction?

Introduction:
In the introduction you mention the increasing number of patients seeking help directly at the emergency department. However, you refer to a study from 1995 and I have some serious questions about this number nowadays. Later on, you refer to a Scandinavian study (Viljakka 1983) that shows a high percentage of ER admittances.

Further, such statements might only be applicable to certain countries. For example, in the Netherlands patients first have to visit their GP or a GP cooperative (out of office hours). Because of this reason, I have some concerns about the actual number of patients visiting the ER for ankle traumas nowadays. Please present more recent published numbers or percentages.

I miss a clear rationale for this study. Why is this important and of interest for the reader? Do you expect that treatment satisfaction differs depending on receiving care in different settings? In line with this, I am wondering why there are 6 lines in the introduction about surgery and the consequences of surgery, while this isn’t related to the subject of this study.

Please formulate a clear objective for this study.

Methods

General:
I would like to suggest organizing the methods section into subheadings with ‘patient selection’, ‘data collection and measurements’ and ‘analysis’. This would make the methods section much more readable.

How many patients were approached for this study and what percentage of these agreed to participate?

“All grades are included”. Please clearly describe what grades of injuries are included in this study, because there is a contrast with the abstract and introduction where you mention grade 1 and 2 and in the methods section “all grades are included”. What about grade 3?

How was the randomization procedure performed? And was the allocation concealed?

Page 5, line 6-9: Should this section not be described in the results? And how many patients demanded physiotherapeutic guidance and how was this divided over the two groups?

Page 5, second paragraph: patient characteristics must be described in the results section. Besides, a table with baseline characteristics is missing (comparison between both intervention groups).

Please clearly describe your measurements and how these were performed. For example, how was the physical examination performed and what were the outcomes? And ‘there was room left’ is very vague.

Analysis: why are the analysis not adjusted for potential confounders. This is a major concern to me because of the potential influence on the outcome of the patient (for example pain on a VAS scale) onto the patient satisfaction. Additionally, the grade of the injury could influence the outcome and satisfaction. Therefore I would suggest a regression analysis with adjustment for potential confounders.

Table 1. What is the exact difference between satisfaction about the treatment and therapy and treatment outcome? Was this clear for the patients?

Results

Page 7: ‘Satisfaction regarding treatment outcome’. Was there a difference between the patients who visited a physiotherapist and the patients who did not? I have some great concerns about this outcome because the analysis is not adjusted for this potential confounder. Therefore I am seriously concerned about the interpretation of this result. Aren’t you measuring the ‘outcome’ of the patient instead of the ‘satisfaction’ of the patient?

Page 7: ‘pain and swelling’. These items are not announced in the methods section. How did you measure these?

Page 7: “There was a tendency…(p=0.129).” What do you mean? Very unclear
sentence.

General:
In the results section you refer to an objective data collection. How is this possible? And was the assessor blinded to the intervention of the patients?

Discussion
Page 10, second paragraph drops out of the blue. Are these medication prescribed? Missing in the methods section.
Page 11, “These results are consistent…” So this is already investigated in other studies? Why isn’t this mentioned in the introduction?
Study limitations section is missing.
Page 11, last section: New results are presented here and should first at least be mentioned in the results chapter.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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