Reviewer's report

Title: Clinical outcomes of an early intervention program for preschool children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a group setting

Version: 1 Date: 17 August 2012

Reviewer: Michael Siller

Reviewer's report:

This is a pre-post study evaluating longitudinal change in global development, adaptive behaviors, and autism symptoms in a group of 26 pre-schoolers who participated in a group-based ESDM model for 9 months. Results reveal significant gains across most outcome measures.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) The authors should provide more detail on how ESDM was adapted to be implemented in a group setting.

2) The authors should give details on attrition (how many children completed the intervention & assessments). The df suggest various missing outcome measures.

3) I may misremember the original ESDM study, but I assume the effect size of the treatment effect was estimated in comparison to the gains in the control group... which is not necessarily comparable to the current metric.

4) The authors should be more cautious in interpreting their findings, given that there was no control group, no random assignment, and no blind assessments (the parents, and probably the researcher administering the Mullen, were not blind to whether the assessment was pre- or post-TMT. Who administered the assessments?

5) How many groups were there? Statistically, children within each group are not independent observations, which challenges the use of t-test.

Minor Essential Revisions

Discretionary Revisions

This study may be well suited to identify variables that distinguish responders from non-responders.

Given the limited conclusions that can be drawn from a study of this kind, I suggest presenting it much more as an opportunity to describe the treatment model (which is innovative) than a test of treatment effects

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests