Reviewer's report

Title: Chronic pain treatment in children and adolescents: Less is good, more is sometimes better

Version: 1  Date: 11 August 2014

Reviewer: Gerard Banez

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General Comments
1. Consider using either the term naturalistic or uncontrolled, rather than switching between these terms throughout the article.
2. Ensure that you are not using causal language throughout when discussing the results in order to reflect the uncontrolled nature of the study.
3. Figures should include labels on both axes and brief caption describing the figure.
4. If I am reading this manuscript correctly, my main concern is that it compares an intensive three-week multimodal inpatient program to one 1 ½ hour psychoeducational session. Comparison of inpatient to outpatient treatment in the field of pediatric pain rehabilitation program is especially important, and I am as interested in reading about this topic as anyone. In this study, however, the treatment doses are so vastly different that a fair comparison cannot be made. It is not apples to apples.
5. Was the manuscript submitted a draft document? The highlighting on several sections of the paper made me wonder whether this was the final or a draft.

Methods Section
1. Consider relabeling/reorganizing the subsections in order to provide better clarity for readers (currently 3 subsection headings include the word procedure).
2. A description of various procedural details is currently spread throughout the methods section. It may be helpful to organize into specific paragraphs on the sample, measures/evaluation, procedure (potentially separating out general center procedures versus procedures specific to this sample), treatment, etc.
3. On page 10, line 4: Was any pharmacological treatment offered during treatment or was it all ‘following treatment?’ Was this treatment recommended for pain, mood, sleep, or something else?
4. On p. 10, line 4: Similar question about physiotherapy: was physiotherapy offered during treatment or just ‘following treatment?’
5. Also on p. 10 under Measures/Average pain intensity: were participants asked to rate an average pain rating for the four week period, or were daily ratings averaged over a four week period?
6. Last subsection on page 11 titled Procedure appears to have some redundant
information that has been previously discussed earlier in this section. As with previous comments, I would consider reformatting to allow for better flow for readers throughout this section.

7. On page 14, lines 1 & 2: the raw change of -1 on the NRS does not appear to be a ‘cut-off’ score in the way that the 23.09 on the P-PDI is. Please clarify. Do the authors mean that a change of 1 on this measure is considered clinically significant?

Results Section
1. May be useful to mention non-significant findings for completers vs decliners in the low and high school absence categories, rather than only mentioning the significant finding.
2. Clinical significance??

Discussion Section
1. In the first sentence, the “( )” around interdisciplinary are unnecessary.
2. In limitations, consider addressing generalizability issues pertaining to socialized healthcare and self-selected assignment of different treatments (versus driven by insurance). It would also be helpful to discuss how self-selection could have influenced the results of the completers vs decliners.
3. Perhaps consider listing as a limitation the brevity of the outpatient treatment program, as this is not a typical length of an outpatient program.
4. In the conclusions section, be careful not to overextend conclusions that can be drawn based upon the aims and methodology of the study. The results cannot “confirm” the necessity of either treatment. Further, the results of this study did not examine how to allocate patients to a specific treatment group and cannot attest to the importance of “allocating appropriately.”
5. Future directions could also include studies with more rigorous experimental designs and comparison of inpatient programs versus lengthier outpatient programs.

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:

No competing interests.