Reviewer's report

Title: Experiences of guided Internet-based cognitive-behavioural treatment for depression: A qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 24 March 2011

Reviewer: Nickolai Titov

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for inviting me to review this interesting paper.

The authors report the results of 12 interviews with participants of a self-help internet treatment program for depression. They identify three change processes categorizing how participants engaged with the treatment material, and report how each change process was reflected in four core themes. The three change processes addressed attitudes towards treatment, views on motivational aspects of treatment, and perceptions of consequences of treatment. The authors conclude that their results corresponded with current models of traditional face-to-face psychotherapy, particularly with respect to identifying that motivation is a crucial aspect of guided self-help for depression and that people who take responsibility for treatment and who attribute success to themselves benefit more.

General Comments

The aim of this study, to obtain a detailed understanding of participants’ experience of treatment in order to improve the effectiveness and to reduce dropouts in Internet-based depression treatments, is important. The general methodological approach was sound, and based on acceptable models. The manuscript is generally well written, appropriate work is cited and referred to, and the title and abstract are appropriately presented.

Unfortunately, as is the case with much qualitative research, only a very small sample (n=12) was used, but a relatively large amount of data was derived from the interviews including four core themes, which were then reviewed based on each of three groups, who reflected different trajectories or experiences of treatment. A significant weakness of this manuscript is that key methodological details were not presented, for example, levels of agreement between interviewers, or agreement between the interviewers and the ‘experienced researchers’ (page 8). This makes it difficult to determine the reliability or validity of the results. I suspect the author’s results and conclusions are valid, but I feel unable to independently determine this based on the presented evidence.

I hope the following comments are helpful.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors should report any available data about the levels of agreement
between the interviewers and researchers when they analysed the interviews and generated the themes and trajectories. The absence of this data makes it difficult to determine the validity and reliability of the results and conclusions.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. The last sentence of the first para (page 3) beginning: “Results revealed two themes …”, is unclear. The authors could clarify what they are referring to by providing a context and brief explanation.
2. The authors should clarify why interviews occurred at 6 months post-treatment rather than a post-treatment or another time, and why 12 people were selected, and not more or less.
3. A brief statement about how this subsample compared along demographic characteristics and symptom severity relative to the larger sample would allow the reader to determine the comparability of the samples, and should be included.
4. It would be helpful if the authors described whether/how the structure of the Client Change Interview was subsequently used in analyses.
5. 1st sentence, page 8: Do the authors mean “interpretation” or “validity”? 
6. The authors should also explain in more details how credibility was determined, for example, what percentage of data was reviewed/checked, and how common was discrepancy, and how was that dealt with?

Discretionary Revisions
1. The first paragraph is rather dense, and covers multiple different topics. Perhaps the authors could divide this into 2, following the words “effect sizes”?

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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 interests