Reviewer's report

Title: Employing crisis postcards with case management in Kaohsiung, Taiwan: 6-month outcomes of a randomised controlled trial for suicide attempters

Version: 4 Date: 1 February 2013

Reviewer: Greg Carter

Reviewer's report:

The revised manuscript is much improved, however there are some issue from the first review that have not been adequately addressed and some additional issues that are now apparent.

Major Issues
There are threats to the internal validity that must be addressed – initial analyses need to include all participants analysed on an intention to treat basis – before effectiveness and sub-group analyses are reported.

The authors are capitalising on the selection biases in reporting the results of the intervention and these results are misleading.

1. The analysis is based on a per-protocol analysis not an intention to treat analysis based on randomisation status. (exclusion of n=106 who did not read postcards).

2. There were other unwarranted exclusions for a RCT analysis–the selected n=761 was further reduced to n=719 for the reported analyses.(excluded based on completion of CM program)

3. The randomisation method is unusual. References should be made to demonstrate the robustness for this approach. I doubt that this is a truly random method of allocation.

Other Issues
1. Beneficial results should be reported as reduced hazard ratios through the manuscript, including sub group analyses.

2. In the abstract and conclusion the authors say “These results suggest that the benefits of the postcard intervention are confined to a relatively small subsample of participants.” It is not clear how this conclusion was reached.

3. Page 4 para 3. There is little evidence for case management being demonstrated to be effective in preventing suicide reattempts. The single study cited is observational and the features of the non-contact group might well have accounted for differences in suicide attempt rather than the case management intervention. The reference for this study is incorrect.

4. Page 4 para 3. The last sentence is poorly worded and unclear.
5. Page 7 para 1. “The crisis postcards were sent to the participants in a sealed envelope after 3 months of full case management services.”
This might be more clearly expressed as “A single crisis postcard was sent to each participant in a sealed envelope after 3 months of full case management services.”

6. “Variables” should include the dependent variable – especially how it is defined and measured – not just its appearance in the national database as an explanation.

7. “Statistical Analysis” All analyses should be described in the Analysis section – including descriptive reporting of the time to first suicide attempt in the four sub-groups. It is not necessary to report a chi square for a difference in proportions for any further suicide attempt and the hazard ratios from the Cox regressions.

8. “Discussion” para1: “Previous studies have also indicated that postcards reduce the risk of suicide (13, 14).” Neither of these cited studies reported suicide risk.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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:**

As for previous review