Reviewer's report

Title: Working alliance and its relationship to outcomes in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of antipsychotic medication

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Reviewer: ilanit Hasson-Ohayon

Reviewer's report:

Dear Prof Lysaker,

Thank you for sending me the manuscript: “Working alliance and its relationship to outcomes in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of antipsychotic medication: for review. The paper deals with and interesting and important issue. The research question is well defined and the statistics is appropriate. I have one major concern that is related to lack of data regarding the nature of the relationships between patients and clinicians (frequency of meeting etc.) that may moderate the results. Below please find a detailed explanation of this issue, as well as additional comments for improving the manuscript:

Minor essential revisions:

1. Title- it should be a randomized controlled trial. (and not an randomised )
2. Please correct randomised to randomized throughout.
3. In introduction- “For instance,[16] found that patients’ negative attitudes to depot medication including the experience of coercion in comparison to oral medication based on two items on the Drug Attitudes Inventory[17], that related to perceptions of being forced to take medication.” The sentence seems to need editing and completing.
4. Introduction- when mentioning first the WAI – write it fully.
5. Discussion: the sentence: “Previous studies have investigated the sorts of factors that might affect the therapeutic relationship and in our study therapeutic relationship at baseline was related to symptom severity which has been reported previously [6-9]." Please complete the sentence – it is not clear.
6. Also the next sentence – write in more details: the relationship between X and Y – and not the relationship with Y...in the way it is written it is hard to follow.
7. Discussion – “The difference in this study is that for the first time working alliance was measured directly and that the investigation was carried out as individuals change from one medication to a depot.” What does directly means?
8. Presenting a table with the ANCOVA analysis might help in showing the effects that were found
9. The conclusion might be better phrased stating the main result of the study and its implications.
Major compulsory revisions:

1. Aims section: it might be beneficial to phrase it differently: it seems not the prescription of LAI but rather the experience. The fact that this is an RCT and participants knew they might get LAI means that it is not the effects of their doctor prescribing them LAI, but their experience while getting it.

2. Were both client and clinician versions of the WAI used? Please provide details.

3. Please provide reliability (alpha cronbach) for all scales and sub-scales.

4. Please provide details regarding who filled the questionnaires – the treating psychiatrist?

5. Data regarding the time length, duration of relationship between patient and clinician is missing. This is of great important since it can affect the therapeutic alliance. In addition more data regarding the clinicians is missing. Where their all psychiatrist? What was the nature of the relationship between them and the patients? Did they meet once a week, once in 2 weeks? For how long? Did they meet before the RCT? In the discussion it is stated that they knew each other for some time. But – more data is needed regarding the relationship? Duration of the relationship might moderate the results of the study.

6. A major result that should get more attention is that clinical improvement was observed in both arms while the WAI decreased in the LAI arm. This result is inconsistent with the literature correlating alliance with clinical improvement, and thus should be addressed in the discussion.

7. Discussion – it is stated that “The fact that patients receiving depot medication perceive a loss of therapeutic relationship is certainly important clinically”. However – this statement is consistent with previous literature on the importance of the alliance with regard to outcome. But in the current study there were no differences in clinical outcome between both arms of the study. Please address this issue.

8. Introduction -A description of the concept of the therapeutic alliance and its components (e.g. agreement on goals and the way to achieve them as measured by the WAI) will be beneficial. In the discussion relating the results to the meaning of the concept is also recommended. This is important since agreement on treatment mode, as part of the alliance, is a question to be raised in the context of RCT.

9. In the limitation is should be emphasis that the nature of the relationship (i.e – number of meeting per month might be crucial for the alliance).

I hope the comments will help improving this interesting and important paper.

Best,
Dr. Ilanit Hasson-Ohayon (PhD)

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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