Reviewer’s report

Title: Pre-treatment predictors of attrition in a randomised controlled trial of psychological therapy for longstanding anorexia nervosa.

Version: 1 Date: 20 December 2013

Reviewer: Secondo Fassino

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript entitled “Pre-treatment predictors of attrition in a randomised controlled trial of psychological therapy for longstanding anorexia nervosa” aims to study a sample of 63 outpatients enrolled in a trial of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Anorexia Nervosa (CBT-AN) and Specialist Supportive Clinical Management (SSCM). The outcome of the paper is studying the role of possible predictors of drop-out in a 30-session psychotherapy for patients suffering of longstanding anorexia nervosa.

The rationale of the study is clear, previous researches on this topic are explained, the details of the treatments are explained in a previous paper.

I have some comments:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) The sample, albeit this limitation is discussed, is small. The authors should better highlight this limitation in order to offer a better framework for the reader.

2) Drop-out rate of the treatments is not enough discussed (see also comment 4).

3) The study consider drop-out those 2 patients who didn’t even start a treatment. In my opinion this patient aren’t drop out, but failed to engage. Please consider this patients differently.

4) I can’t understand, when reading Touyz et al., 2013, how “[…]A total of 55 (87.3%) participants completed treatment, 26 of 31 (83.9%) in CBT-AN and 29 of 32 (90.6%) in SSCM (Fisher’s exact p = 0.474)[…]” showing a “[…] a retention rate of 85% (which to our knowledge is the highest of any study of adult AN).” can now became 48/63, if the length of the studies is declared to be the same. May you provide an account for this difference?

5) Reading Touyz et al., 2013 patients are described as severe and enduring, here they are described as “longstanding” or “severe and enduring”: data about baseline characteristics should be, if not provided because of being described in the previous paper, at least discussed, being the evaluation of the severity of global eating disorder psychopathology (here measured with EDE) discussed in the results as a predictor. Moreover the role of global ED psychopathology in predicting attrition is unclear as shown by previous literature. The manuscript could be easier to read if you may highlight this characteristic of the sample.

a. A more speculative issue (not a comment but an intellectual curiosity) could be
why you choose not to use only the expression “severe and enduring”, which you introduce in the previous paper and could offer a valiant alternative of “chronic”, instead of using, as you do in this paper both “longstanding” and “severe and enduring”

Minor Essential Revisions
Trivial note:
Page 13, line 16: Delete close parenthesis.

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:
I declare that I have no competing interests