Reviewer’s report

Title: Screening and brief interventions for hazardous and harmful alcohol use among hospital outpatients in South Africa: results from a randomized controlled trial

Version: 4 Date: 8 April 2013

Reviewer: Simon Coulton

Reviewer’s report:

Many thanks for the revised version of the paper and it is much improved. There are still a couple of issues that may mislead a reader and I think it is worth addressing them prior to publication

1. The hypothesis is not stated as a null hypothesis, while this may appear pedantic what is written cannot be tested using the methods applied, you can only find a null hypothesis to be untrue and as such the hypothesis should be stated as such. They is no difference in terms of AUDIT score at 12 months between control and those receiving brief intervention.

2. In the revised data analysis section it states that differences between groups was conducted using Mann-Whitney U-test for continuous data and chi-square for categorical data, but later in the same paragraph it states ANCOVA and logistic regression were employed, this is contradictory.

3. The study is described as an efficacy study but it looks more like an effectiveness study, 15% of those allocated to brief intervention received less than 13 of the 15 requisite intervention steps. So members of the intervention group were analysed as members of this group irrespective of the actual intervention delivered.

4. On page 10 two different ITT assumptions were tested, these are not ITT assumptions but missing data imputations. One including all available data and the second imputing missing data.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

None