Reviewer's report

Title: The Positive Outlook Study- a randomised controlled trial evaluating the effectiveness of an online self-management program targeting psychosocial issues for men living with HIV: a study protocol

Version: 1 Date: 1 October 2013

Reviewer: Els Clays

Reviewer's report:

This is a very well written study protocol that generally provides sufficient details about the theoretical background of the intervention and the study design.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
- Although there seems to be a lack of online self-management programs targeting PLHIV, the authors mention a systematic review of (off-line) self-management interventions for this target group. The content and effects of these interventions are only briefly touched upon. It would benefit the readers to find out more about this, and get an idea of how this new intervention relates to the existing ones.
- Little or no information is available regarding process evaluation of the study.
- Did the authors consider the possibility of contamination between intervention and control groups?
- Will the degree of participation within the intervention group be monitored?
- Too little information is provided regarding sample size calculations. The calculation was based on only self-efficacy as primary outcome measure: which expected difference was included in the calculation, and were other measures considered as well? The sample size calculation results in a sample of 380 participants. It is not clear whether this will be the actual targeted sample size: how many rounds of randomisation of 30 people will be done and is a sample of 380 feasible?
- One of the primary outcomes will be measured by a newly designed instrument: the Positive Outlook Self-efficacy Scale. This might cause serious methodological limitations. More details should be provided about the development process. Can any validity or reliability results be obtained?

Minor Essential Revisions:
- Abstract: please specify type of quality of life measure as primary vs secondary outcome
- Objective of the study, line 2: spell out "heiQ"
- Development of the intervention: needs assessment, at the end of the second last paragraph: remove "(findings from the needs assessment will be published)" since this information is replicated in the next paragraph.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests