Author’s response to reviews

Title: Does surgery followed by physiotherapy improve short and long term outcome for patients with atraumatic shoulder instability compared with physiotherapy alone? Protocol for a randomized controlled clinical trial

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Editorial policy of BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders supports the publication of study protocols in order to reduce the risk of non-publication of research findings and to facilitate methodological discussion.

There is a paucity of placebo-controlled, randomised clinical trials evaluating the effectiveness of orthopaedic surgical procedures. As a result it is difficult to assess the contribution of the contextual effects of the high levels of stress and ritual associated with surgery on outcome following orthopaedic surgery. The submitted protocol has gained ethical approval, contains a sham-controlled surgical arm, utilises clinically relevant, reliable measures to evaluate short and longer term outcome and has the power to determine if the addition of stabilisation surgery to physiotherapy improves outcome for patients with atraumatic shoulder instability. The results of this study will have direct and immediate impact on clinical decision making by establishing definitively if patients presenting with soft tissue shoulder joint damage associated with atraumatic shoulder instability should be referred for stabilization surgery before commencing physiotherapy rehabilitation in order to achieve optimal outcome. This in turn will ensure effective, efficient use of scarce health resources to manage for this common, often disabling, musculoskeletal condition.