Author's response to reviews

Title: Evaluation of pain and function after two home exercise programs in a clinical trial on women with chronic neck pain - with special emphasises on completers and responders

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Version: 5 Date: 13 December 2013

Author's response to reviews: see over
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Title: Evaluation of pain and function after two home exercise programs in a clinical trial on women with chronic neck pain - with special emphasises on completers and responders

Authors: Linn Karlsson, Esa-Pekka Takala, Björn Gerdle, Britt Larsson

Version: 4 Date: 13 December 2013

Author’s response to reviews: Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Thank you for the positive response on our revised manuscript, id: 8735595831019231.

In our opinion we have been able to handle the remaining minor revisions suggested by two of the reviewers. Therefore it is our hope that the revised manuscript now can be accepted for publication in BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders.

We have appended a point-to-point reply starting on next page. The revisions in manuscript and tables are marked with green highlight.

With best regards

Linn Karlsson

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<table>
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<th>Reviewer 1 Kenneth Jay Andersen’s comments</th>
<th>Our changes, corrections and comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>No further revisions necessary.</td>
<td>Thank you for the positive message.</td>
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<th>Reviewer 2 Petri Salo’s comments</th>
<th>Our changes, corrections and comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dear authors, you have managed to clearly improve the manuscript since the first revision. I will recommend publishing the manuscript just after couple of minor corrections.</td>
<td>Thank you for the positive comments.</td>
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| a) You state that a physiotherapist did the clinical examination to the study subjects. Then you write on page 7 line 4 that "patients with the diagnosis of...." My question is that who gave the diagnosis, because a physiotherapist is not allowed to make a diagnosis. Thus, if the subjects did not meet a doctor stating the diagnosis you must explain where the diagnosis came from. Of perhape you should just describe the symptoms. | a) Point taken. The physiotherapist were instructed by a doctor who stated the symptoms included in the diagnose (ref nr 27 in the text). During the examination, the physiotherapist identified if the subjects had these symptoms or not. The sentences has been rephrased. Word in italic is now in the text: "Patients having symptoms consistent with the diagnosis of tension neck syndrome...". “In addition, symptoms consistent with the clinical diagnose...” Page 7. |

| b) page 7, randomization and blinding. Give a reference or manufacturer to the Computer program minitab v. 15 | b) Point taken. “(Minitab Inc., www.minitab.com)”, is now in the text. Page 7. |

| c) page 8, interventions section. "The remaining training period consisted of three weeks of exercise with the heaviest..." You should highlight here that the remaining time means up to one year and consisted of these four week periods where the training was like..... | c) Point taken. The sentence has been rephrased. Words in italics has been added: “During the remaining training period of one year, the strength training consisted of three weeks of exercise with the heaviest weight possible...” Page 8. |

| d) page 9, line 10. "Most participants attended at least two instruction sessions" This is results and should be in results section or in the discussion. | d) Point taken. The sentence has been moved to the result section. “After inclusion, each subject was invited to three instruction sessions in order to learn the prescribed exercises. Most participants attended at least two instruction sessions.” Is now added in the result section, page 14. |

| e) page 12, sample size, last sentence "We did not fully succeed....." this again is results and should be either in the results or discussion. | e) Point taken. The sentence has been moved, and rephrased. The result section now begins with the following sentences: “The design of the trial comprised 50 subjects in each group. We managed to include...” |
34 subjects in STRENGTH and 23 subjects in STRETCH. This was due to a lack of eligible subjects available during a reasonable time-period for the recruitment.”

Page 14.

f) page 18, second section, last sentence. "As mentioned above with respect to the achieved power of the present study, it cannot be excluded..." this is rather useless speculation in scientific writing and I would just skip it.

d) Point taken.
The sentence mention by referee PS is now deleted.

g) Table 3. Completers in STRENGTH at 4 to 6 months, n=19 the percentage should be 79% and non completers n=5 the percentage should be 21%. And actually can you say in the heading that "...compared to baseline" because you don't report the percentages compared to baseline n, which were 34 in STRENGTH and 23 in STRETCH.

g) Point taken
We assume the referee means “cannot say compared to baseline” in the heading because actually we don’t report the percentages compared to baseline. The percentage is now corrected in the table and “compared to baseline” is deleted from heading. In addition, “proportions” is added to the heading. Table 3, page 28.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewer 3 Per Kjaer’s comments</th>
<th>Our changes, corrections and comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>The authors did a great job implementing the reviewers suggestions and have improved the research report substantially. I have only minor suggestions below.</td>
<td>Thank you for the positive comments.</td>
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1. Suggest move the first paragraph in the new section “analysis of results” to become the first para in “statistics” after the responders and the completers have been defined. Re-consider heading to be concerning definition of subgroups for analysis.

1. Point taken.
The paragraph mentioned by referee PK is now moved to former “statistics”. The headings are changed from “analysis of results” to “Completers and responders” and from “Statistics” to “Analyses and statistics”. In addition, two complementing sentences has been added under heading Completers and responders:
“Adherence to prescribed exercise was one main interest in this trial. Hence, completers and responders were defined as subgroups for results analysis.” Page 12 – 13.

2. Discussion, second para,
Decrease in pain and function should be re-phrased to NDI function score or increase in function.

2. Point taken.
The sentence is now rephrased. Word in italics is now in the text: “A decrease in pain intensity and increase in function was found...” Page 18.

3. Table 1. Something strange happened

3. Point taken.
Table 1 is now a little bit smaller. We hope that it now will be stable during formatting. Page 25.