Reviewer's report

Title: Exercise programme with telephone follow-up for people with hand osteoarthritis - protocol for a randomised controlled trial.

Version: 1 Date: 16 December 2013

Reviewer: Krysia Dziedzic

Reviewer's report:

This study will answer an important question for patients, health professionals and policy makers. This is a well described proposal with detailed information on an intervention for a randomised controlled trial of exercise with telephone follow-up in individuals with hand osteoarthritis compared with usual primary care. The protocol has been reported using the CONSORT and SPIRIT guidance. The intervention is detailed and well described. The illustrations are very helpful. The involvement of patients and health professionals in the design of the study is an additional strength.

Discretionary revisions: I have only a couple of minor suggestions and comments which the authors may wish to address in the manuscript:

Abstract
Background: The authors highlight that available research is very limited. It is also at times conflicting and this is worth stating here and later in the discussion.
Methods: Participants are classified using Physician-confirmed hand osteoarthritis. They follow the ACR clinical criteria and this is worth stating in the abstract.

The description of the ‘treatment as usual’ can be refined as this is primary care treatment and participants are more likely to be exercised naïve.
‘Participants will be instructed to perform the exercise programme at home’ rather than ‘will perform the exercise… at home’. Adherence will be captured using self-report.
A measure of global improvement could also be included in the abstract.

Background
Additional references could support the statements on the consequences of hand OA and the resulting activity limitations and participation restriction.
The conflicting findings for the benefits of exercise in hand OA are worth highlighting.

The study objective
The direction of the effects of the intervention could be included in a hypothesis or study question
Methods
Participants: Will participants from the two OA cohorts be naïve to hand exercises?
Eligibility criteria: Participants are recruited from cohorts - will two members living at the same address be eligible for inclusion – they may get allocated to different arms of the study? Will participants having received occupational therapy or physiotherapy treatment in the previous six months be excluded?
Randomisation and allocation concealment
Will information be collected on individuals approached to be part of the study and those consenting to assessment?
Blinding
The statistician performing the main analyses will be unaware of group allocation. When will the statistician be un-blinded?
Intervention
The procedures for both intervention and control arms could be described in a table which may help the reader to navigate through the process.
The description of usual care could be expanded. ‘Treatment as usual’ is primary care management and this is worth noting. Does this mean that participants in the usual care arm get a referral back to the GP or is it a more ad-hoc or community-based usual care? What written information do all participants get when entering into the study?
The intervention is detailed and well described. The illustrations are very helpful. How will attendance be reported? Is there a per protocol definition?
Outcome measures
Why has 3 - months been selected as the primary endpoint rather than six months?
Other measures
These could be described as Tertiary outcome measures (also Table 4)
Data analysis
Responders will be compared using the OMERACT-OARSI responder criteria. A brief description of how this will be done would be helpful e.g. which measures will be used?
Sample size
A 10% seems feasible with a three month primary end point.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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