Reviewer's report

Title: Music therapy to promote psychological and physiological relaxation in palliative care patients: Protocol of a randomized controlled trial

Version: Date: 30 October 2014

Reviewer: Clare O'Callaghan

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Minor Essential Revisions
1. This study compares outcomes between 2 groups (music therapy and mindfulness) and appears to test the hypothesis of no difference between these groups. The research questions indicate that improvement in outcomes by either intervention compared to patients receiving usual care may also be of interest. That cannot be answered using this design where there is no usual care group. Two options exist: (I) include a usual care control group, or (ii) amend the research questions.

For example, relating to research question 3: if post music therapy quality of life is found to improve compared to baseline then without a control group the inference that the change is due to the music therapy intervention is only valid if it is known that no patients receiving standard care ever have improved quality of life in the palliative care setting under examination. If a proportion of patients having standard care have improved quality of life over time then without a control group this question remains unanswerable using your design.

Discretionary Revisions
1. Instead of "Music therapy might ..." (page 4, line 5) I suggest you distinguish studies that show significant effect from those without significant effect. If they all had significant findings, you could state something like "music therapy has been associated with ..." and if there are contradictory results you could state that the findings are mixed.

2. Please check reference 7. It has been withdrawn from the Cochrane Database.

3. I suggest that you include an interpretation of the relevance of the changes in posterior theta activity and decrease in alpha band and mid-frontal beta-2 band activity" (page 7).

4. I suggest you give the English meaning of the CD stated further down on page 7 ("Stressbewaltigung ..." for non-German speaking readers.

5. Please clarify ICD in the "List of abbreviations"

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests