Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 11 November 2014

Reviewer: Michael Teut

Reviewer’s report:

This is a very innovative study protocol and contributes to the field of music therapy in palliative care.

Before accepting the manuscript for publication I would recommend the authors to include some additional information and improve the discuss of the intervention:

Minor Essential Revisions:

Please add/explain under outcomes and sample size calculation the primary outcome parameter and the timepoint of evaluation, also explain more in detail the sample size calculation (primary outcome parameter, background, expected drop out rate).

I understand that the study has already been approved by the ethics board and might have been started. I would reflect on the fact that the music therapy also contains MBSR interventions (e.g. body scan). So in fact this is a study on patients generally receiving palliative care (both arms), MBSR in combination with music therapy (intervention) versus MBSR alone (control). I would recommend to discuss this. Generally I would have liked to add a palliative care alone control group as third arm to evaluate the differences of both interventions to standard care alone.

Also in the music therapy arm there will be the therapeutic factor of a social/therapeutic relationship which may contribute substantially to the effect of the intervention.

As the study has already been approved and possibly started I recommend to discuss the differences between intervention and control in the discussion section, especially regarding the element of mindfulness, which is present in both groups.

If you are using a Body- Tambura as Monochord for the intervention I would recommend to name it as such (see Reference 21).

I am very curious about the results of this trial and hope that the authors will be able to recruit the necessary number of participants.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

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