Reviewer’s report

Title: Phase 1 pilot study of e-mail support for people with long term conditions using the Internet

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Reviewer: Deena Chisolm

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This manuscript describes a pilot study designed to assess the feasibility of an RCT for an e-mail-based support intervention for use of online health information. The stated goals are to test the relative effectiveness of recruitment strategies and to test potential process and outcome measures. The pilot however leaves many unanswered questions for the design of an RCT.

Major revisions

1. The authors never define the study eligibility criteria beyond being diagnosed with a Long Term Condition (LTC). The variety and quality of online health resources varies significantly across conditions. Also the need to use online health support varies significantly across disease and disease severity. Authors should explain the inclusion and exclusion criteria (conditions, ages, etc.) and rationale.

2. The fact that the most productive method of recruitment, using a very broad participant definition, yielded on 7% participation demonstrates a significant problem with self-selection. This self-selection seems to be confirmed in the responses of the participants. Discussion should address how the authors intend to address this issue in the RCT design.

3. The requirement that participants visit a website to learn about the study and complete the consent process limits eligibility to current internet users. Was this the goal? Please clarify.

4. The 50% attrition rate is a concern because of the potential for bias. It is stated that attrition was not associated with recruitment method. Was attrition associated with participant demographics or baseline internet self-efficacy?

5. The design of the intervention is not well specified. Is it designed using any specific theory (e.g. motivational interviewing)? How was health literacy assessed for customization of the delivery? How was fidelity assessed? Please provide additional detail.

6. One of the primary outcome measures discussed was opportunity for improvement in use of internet resources but that measure assumes that there is value in increasing the use of all potential internet applications for all persons with LTCs. This assumption is not proven. Is there really value in increasing the use of internet telephony in people with mild asthma? By developing a more
focused study population the authors could test the use of more validated applications and systems. This should be addressed in the discussion.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.