Reviewer's report

Title: Cost-effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy versus talking and usual care for depressed older people in primary care

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Reviewer: Hans Grabe

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This is a well written paper investigating the cost-effectiveness of CBT in depressed older people compared to a talking control (TC) and treatment as usual (TAU) in a primary care setting.

The treatment trial was published in 2009 in the top journal of the field (General Archives of Psychiatry) indicating a high quality of the design and conduction of the study.

For the present analysis cost data generated from this single blind randomised controlled trial were analyzed. Direct treatment costs were compared with reductions in depression scores (BDI-II). The overall total per patient costs (including intervention costs) were significantly higher in the CBT group compared with the TAU group at 10 month follow up (difference £427,95% CI: £56 - £787). Reductions in BDI-II scores were significantly greater in the CBT group (difference 3.6 points, 95% CI: 1-6 points). CBT is associated with an incremental cost of £120 per additional point reduction in BDI score and a 90% probability of being considered cost-effective if purchasers are willing to pay up to £270 per point reduction in the BDI-II score.

The authors conclude that CBT is significantly more costly than TAU alone or TAU plus TC, but more clinically effective.

In all this an important paper applying appropriate statistical methods.

I have only minor comments (Discretionary Revisions):

1. The authors might want to discuss that their cost analyses is limited to the health service situation in the UK. In case of higher baseline use of mental health care services the results of cost analysis in this trial may have been different. Also it would be very interesting to analyzed long-term effects of CBT e.g. after 2 years.

2. The following statement is not completely clear to me: "The CEAC shows a 90% probability that CBT will be considered cost effective if purchasers are willing to pay up to £270 per point reduction in BDI-II score (Figure 3)." Especially in the light that "CBT is associated with an incremental cost of £120 per additional point reduction in BDI score" the prior statement is not easy to understand for a non-economist.
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'