Reviewer's report

Title: Behavioral Health Coaching for Rural Veterans with Diabetes and Depression: Blending Effectiveness and Implementation

Version: 1 Date: 24 October 2013

Reviewer: Frances Cunningham

Reviewer's report:

Overall Comment
• The manuscript presents a protocol for a randomised controlled trial to evaluate a coaching intervention which seeks to address uncontrolled diabetes and comorbid symptoms of depression in a US Veterans population, compared with usual care. The article provides a good contribution to the literature as there is a need for further rigorously conducted research exploring cost-effective approaches in this area.

Are sufficient details provided to allow replication of the work or comparison with related analyses: if not, what is missing?
• Sufficient details are provided to allow replication of the work and comparison with related analyses.

Type of Paper - Study Protocol
• This manuscript presents a study protocol for proposed research (the research appears to be currently ongoing) and submission of this type of article is consistent with BMC HSR instructions to authors on the types of articles accepted by the journal. Study protocol papers may describe proposed or ongoing research.

• It is noted that the BMC HSR author guidelines state that study protocols for pilot or feasibility studies are not usually considered. Instead, authors are encouraged to submit the results of the pilot as a research article. The authors have taken this approach. BMC HSR suggests that the study protocol should be published for the definitive study. The authors have submitted their study protocol for the main study in keeping with these requirements and they have published a pilot study separately.

Is the writing acceptable?
• Yes, the manuscript is generally well-written.

A. MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS
1. Elements of manuscript
The BMC HSR author guidelines state that the protocol should provide a detailed account of the hypothesis, rationale and methodology of the study. Protocols should also follow the CONSORT Guidelines.
• The manuscript should identify as a randomised trial in the title.
• The protocol does not state any hypotheses – there is therefore no detailed account of the hypotheses. However the goals of the research study are stated. The rationale and methodology of the study are provided.
• The protocol manuscript complies with other requirements of the CONSORT Guidelines.

2. Will the study design adequately test the hypothesis?
• The study design appears appropriate to adequately test the study aim. However it is likely to be difficult for the study to show clear differences in health outcomes for intervention participants versus controls with a coaching intervention covering 6 months, and a study period of 12 months. The authors should explain how their study will address this issue.

3. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition: if not, in what ways?
• The manuscript does adhere to the relevant standards for reporting. Additional detail should be provided on data deposition.

B. MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

11. Other issues in manuscript
• In paragraph 2, p.5, could the authors clarify what they mean by ‘within integrated healthcare settings, such as primary care’. This needs to be clarified for international readers, particularly as primary care is not always provided in an integrated healthcare setting.
• In paragraph 3, p.13, in the last paragraph on the page, do the authors mean ‘stimulate’, rather than ‘simulate’? Also in this paragraph additional detail should be provided on the ‘non-primary care-based coaches’ – who are they, and how are they recruited?
• In the second paragraph on p.14, could the authors please clarify what they mean by ‘disseminating intervention efforts to important stakeholders through the use of structured medical-record templates for the documentation of treatment ….’ Do the medical-record note templates become part of the patient’s electronic health record?
• In the second paragraph of p.17, what do the authors mean by: ‘the effectiveness of telephone-based depression treatment with Veterans is limited’? Do they mean studies of the effectiveness of such treatment?
• In the final manuscript paragraph, it would help the international reader if the authors could also refer to any payment, or financial coverage aspects that would be relevant to the provision of such services in the future under prevailing health care delivery arrangements for US veterans. Is there financial coverage in the VA system for veterans for such services, even if such treatment options are made available through alternative options in the private sector?
Level of interest: An article of importance 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.