Reviewer's report

Title: Reactions to treatment unmasking among the participants of a placebo controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 18 December 2004

Reviewer: Glyn Elwyn

Reviewer's report:

This is a well conducted study that is explained well. It is in an under researched area and should definitely be published. There are improvements possible:

In order of appearance in the paper:

1. In results section. The sentence that says “it felt inappropriate to inform participants™. Who is â€œ™. The wording is confusing.
2. It™s not clear when the research was done. The original RCT was between 1995 and 1998. We need to know the gap to this work.
3. This gap is critical and in my opinion puts one of the major areas in doubt. There is much discussion about expectations and hope. First â€œ I am not sure if people recalling a trial that is probably around 7 years ago can remember anything at all, even perhaps might have forgotten that they took part. Secondly, what is the difference between an expectation and a hope? This is not clearly explained and I doubt if it is a valid distinction at the patient level with this number of years between study and trial.
4. In the results, we have a lot about the original trial (page 12). I think this has to go to a different section of the paper as background or to a table. These are not the results of the study. A flow chart of the original study might help but not in results.
5. Confusing trial if it was episodes. Did this mean that there were patients that got placebo for one episode and active for another? If so, then this would affect many things in this study. Please clarify.
6. First sentence of Discussion is normally principal findings. Here we have method.
7. Check if new results coming here and transfer to Results.
8. Note debate around expectations. Care here as the recall gap is too long to be meaningful and although acknowledged, more has to be made of this. How long did ethical approval take. When was the study initiated?
9. This is original work and although there are problems, provided they are declared, the work should be published.

Glyn Elwyn
Professor of Primary Medical Care
18-12-04

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.