Reviewer's report

Title: Knee arthroscopy and exercise versus exercise only for chronic patellofemoral pain syndrome. A randomized controlled trial.

Version: 1 Date: 27 June 2007

Reviewer: Sita M Bierma-Zeinstra

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Introduction, Page 3:

It is not clearly stated why it is of importance to analyze the usefulness of arthroscopy in an randomized clinical trial to assess its efficacy because, as stated in the introduction, arthroscopy is used to make a specific diagnosis. From the introduction it would be more logical to emphasize the additional value of arthroscopy on the diagnostics of PFPS and testing the consequences of arthroscopy on the outcome. Please clarify this more in the introduction.

Methods, page 3,4 and table 1.

Inclusion criteria: PFPF pain during activities such as jumping, running etc. Did they had to have pain on all that activities or was pain during one activity enough to meet the criteria? Please specify.

Table 1: It is surprising that the word 'possibly' is used to define the inclusion criteria. Maybe it is more clear to leave both sentences out of the inclusion criteria because they are not inclusion/exclusion criteria on itself.

Methods, page 6, data analysis:

What was the reason not to include all patients in the analyses by means of last value carried forward or imputation or repeated measurements? Please explain in the results or discussion.

Results, page 7 and 8:

Data is missing on possible interventions of included patients before the start of the study. It could be possible that some patients received physiotherapy, for example one month before this study. It would be interesting to be more specific on possible intervention in the previous year before the study. Because as mentioned in the introduction, chronic cases are included after failure of conservative treatment. Is this conservative treatment not the same as the home-exercises within the study? Please clarify.
Table 4, page 17:
Number of patients for each category is unclear. 17 patients did receive a surgical treatment, also mentioned in the text. For each patient the articular cartilage lesion grade is given (total 28), but how are the other arthroscopy findings distributed over the cartilage gradings? Please specify the 17 surgical treated patients. What treatment did each patient receive? This table is hard to understand, try to make it more clear.

Discussion, page 9:
Is there any data available on the compliance of the home exercises? It is generally known that the compliance of given home exercises is not quite high. So you should discuss this possible lack of compliance in your discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Methods, page 4:
Three patients were excluded on the basis of the orthopedics surgeons examination. Figure 1 shows 5 excluded patients, but four of them did not meet the inclusion criteria. Please explain.

Page 5:
Text is not in correspondence with figure 1. All patients who were randomized into the arthroscopy group received the treatment (text), but figure 1 shows that one patient did not receive allocated treatment.

Results, page 7 and 8:
The mean in improvement on the Kujala score in the text is 12.9 in the arthroscopy group, but in table 3 the mean improvement is: 80.8 – 68.9 = 11.9.
The mean improvement on the Kujala score of the control group in the text is 11.4, but in table 3: 86.3 – 73.8 = 12.5.

Table 3:
What do you mean by ‘VAS during sitting up’?

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests