Reviewer's report

Title: A cluster randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness of and lessons learned from a multifaceted, interdisciplinary educational intervention for general practitioners providing primary care to patients with systolic heart failure

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Reviewer: Leif Erhardt

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The investigators should be complimented for trying to address an important issue of care and it is a pity that they failed to reach the number of patients that would have been needed to answer the important questions raised in this trial. The cluster design used in this investigation is difficult to apply since usually (as also seen in this trial) doctors who are not in an active group will change their practice and improve treatment of their patients. Therefore any calculation of possible differences may be spurious.

The number of patients needed to fulfill the estimated difference was 470 and to reach this number 60 GP’s were needed each contributing 8 patients.

In reality, only 35 GP’s were recruited and randomized, and the number of patients was 168; about 1/3 of the projected need.

This clearly makes any findings of the study questionable, and especially to perform analyses of subgroups.

Not surprisingly there were no differences in the SF-36 scores and the heart failure self-care behavior scores improved slightly in both groups.

Because of the low number of patients any statistical calculations will be flawed and the result be caused by play of chance.

I find it obvious that there is no need to further analyze the data and their interpretation by the investigators since the number of patients is far too low to allow any conclusions. The findings may at best be used for planning further investigations and to generate hypotheses.

Level of interest: Reject as not of sufficient priority to merit publishing in this journal

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' of the above.