Reviewer's report

Title: Development of a complex oral health care intervention after stroke: using a mixed methods pilot study to inform the design of a randomised controlled trial.

Version: 4 Date: 31 May 2011

Reviewer: Allan Donner

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I stated in my original review that I was concerned with the very considerable attrition of patient numbers from baseline to Time 2 in Table 3 (now Table 4). I specifically stated that "some detailed discussion of the reasons for such heavy attrition and the implications for interpretation of the trial results should be given." My emphasis on this particular table stemmed from the fact that it focuses on a primary outcome variable.

I do not feel that this point has been sufficiently addressed in the revised version of the paper. More fundamentally, the excessive level of attrition between time points has serious implications for how differences in response between these time points can be properly interpreted. The authors state in the revised version that "the high rate of attrition from initial recruitment numbers upon admission is reflective of the current NHS in-patient stroke management process". This may be so, but this explanation still fails to help the reader to properly interpret the "before-after" change score analyses and their corresponding p-values (some of which purport to show statistical significance). The averaging of responses taken at different time points only further complicates the interpretation of this table.