Reviewer's report

Title: Effectiveness of an online group course for adolescents and young adults with depressive symptoms: Protocol of a randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 18 July 2011

Reviewer: lawrence friedman

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There are several areas that should be clarified.

a) On the second page, first paragraph under Background, the 6.7% is unclear. Is this incidence? And it doesn’t really make sense to use such a precise figure for the population. If the number is used, it should be couched in a phrase such as, “One study found that ….” Also, the 20% comes from a reference that is 15 years old. Is there an updated reference?

b) On the fourth page, under Randomization, knowing that the blocks are of size two (especially in an unblinded trial) can subconsciously cause an investigator to delay entering someone in order to affect the assignment. It would have been better to either randomly change the block size or keep it hidden. In the same paragraph, it is said that if a participant declines, a tailored referral will be provided. Can a participant decline after randomization? If so, how will the analysis be done (with or without this participant)?

c) On the fifth page, a description of what those assigned to control will do and how they will be contacted for the repeat assessment would be helpful.

d) On the seventh page, there is no mention of any interim monitoring. Despite excluding those deemed prone to suicide, there might still be some suicide attempts. Is there any safety concern that would suggest interim monitoring could be important? Also, what if the outcome trends in the unexpected direction? Is this a safety concern?

e) Pagination should be included.