Reviewer’s report

Title: CASPER (CollAborative Care in Screen-Positive EldeRs): a fully randomised evaluation of collaborative care and active surveillance for screen-positive elders with sub-threshold depression.

Version: 2 Date: 1 August 2011

Reviewer: Prathap Tharyan

Reviewer’s report:

There are three parts to this study: a) Assembly of a cohort of elders with sub-threshold depressive symptoms that will enable a study of the natural history as well as participate in future studies, yet to be defined; b) a pragmatic RCT evaluating the hypothesis that collaborative stepped care will enable the detection of people who develop threshold depressive symptoms over 12 months of follow up and will be superior to standard GP follow up in averting this; c) validation of the 2-question screen, compared to a diagnostic interview.

The protocol design will adequately enable the evaluation of the two elements b) and c) and enable the assembly of the cohort

Minor essential revisions

The details of randomization and allocation concealment need further elaboration to assess more fully the risk of bias in the methods to be used.

In the methods section:

a) A description of whether elders recruited will be from the community or from other facilities (with a potential for further clustering effects) and how this will be allocated to each case manager will help to assess for potential clustering effects; the case load used for the sample size calculation is 20; will this be a fixed limit or only an estimate of the case load for a case manager?

b) Depression severity as assessed by the PHQ 9 during a diagnostic interview at 4 months appears to be the tool to be used to assess the primary outcome. Clarity in describing how exactly this will be done will help, since the PHQ 9 is described as a self-assessment instrument. The time points for the secondary outcomes need to be specified but presumably are at 4 and 12 months.

c) Will this primary outcome be a binary description of those who have threshold symptoms or a continuous measure or a categorical one?

Minor essential revisions:

A spell check needs to be used throughout, particularly for references, 15, 17, & 25- and formatting of reference 13.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

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'