Author's response to reviews

Title: Study protocol: The InterHerz project- A web-based psychological treatment for cardiac patients with depression: a randomized controlled trial

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Version: 3 Date: 29 November 2012

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Professors,

Thank you for your letter dated 13th November concerning the minor revision of this submission to Trials. We are pleased that the reviewer and the editor see the potential of our protocol. We have read thoroughly the issues raised by the reviewer and the editor and are now submitting a revision in which we hope to address their concerns. Our responses to the concerns are detailed below:

1. The reviewer and the editor asked to include details about the trial status. The recruitment period has already begun and the trial is currently ongoing. Estimated date of finished data collection is June 2013. We added the following sentence after the discussion section: ‘Trial status: Recruitment of participants is on-going; it began in March 2012 and is expected to end in June 2013’.

2. The reviewer wished to clarify the target group of our study throughout the manuscript. We apologize for this confusion raised by the use of different terms. We are including patients with any type of heart disease. The manuscript was revised accordingly and the terms cardiac and heart disease are used throughout the manuscript. However, in fact most of the studies were done with patients on coronary heart disease. This led to the confusion in the original submission.

3. In response to the comment of the reviewer we have added further information on sample size calculation. On page 7, the following sentence was included: ‘This estimation is based on the use of a repeated measures analysis of variance, a level of significance of 0.05 (two sided), 80% statistical power (1-Beta), correlations between pre- and post-assessment found in previous studies and was calculated by G-Power [39].’

4. The reviewer asked for further information about incurring exclusion criteria. Participants will not be excluded during the study in case of worsening of any cardiac symptoms. We have added the following sentence to the method section: ‘Participants will remain in the study in case of further progression of the heart disease during study participation.’

5. The reviewer wished further information on contact opportunities of the study participants. Participants can contact the psychologist via email. The sentence was completed by adding this information.

6. The reviewer asked to clarify the responsibility of assessment of eligible patients. A psychologist is assessing all patients who show any interest. We have added this information to the manuscript on page 9.

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7. We understand that the assessment of medication and life style changes have not been described clearly. We apologize for that and have added the following sentence on page 10: ‘Recent medication and compliance to medication are assessed by free text and health-related lifestyle (e.g. smoking, physical activity, diet), with items dichotomized in line with earlier studies of the research team [47].’

8. We apologize for the mistake in the very last sentence and we have changed it accordingly. The sentence in the manuscript is now: ‘This investigation will allow extend our knowledge about the benefits and limits of a web-based psychological treatment which integrates the most recent treatment approaches for depressed cardiac patients.’

We would like to thank the reviewer for his suggestions.

Sincerely,

Nadine Messerli-Bürgy, PhD