Reviewer’s report

Title: Task-oriented training with computer gaming in people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or osteoarthritis (OA) of the hand: Study protocol of a randomized controlled pilot trial

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Reviewer: Marissa Lassere

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Suggested Revisions:

That the Discussion section (which is short) includes the authors’ four responses to the issues that impact interpretation of study results. It clarifies why certain choices were made regarding study design. For example:

Discussion

The age limit of the study participants in the present study was between 30-60 years in order to minimize the presence of any co-morbid conditions associated with aging. Although this may be a younger age group than many clinic populations, if there is failure to find an effect in this age group it is less likely that an effect will be found in an older group of patients.

A hypothetical DASH score range of 25 to 50 out of the maximum score of 100 was selected initially to include individuals presenting with moderate level of difficulty perceived in performing common activities of daily life. We chose to exclude individuals with mild difficulties or with severe limitations because the task-oriented training (experimental intervention) may either be easy or very demanding which may impact the treatment responses. Furthermore, this would allow homogenous baseline level of self-reported symptoms and function in all the participants.

People with a diagnosis of diseases of heart or lungs that may functionally debilitate the individual in the normal day to day life are excluded as home based hand exercise program may be even more demanding. Although this may limit the generalisability of the results to patients with RA and OA that are relatively healthy, this is appropriate in this pilot study.

As this study was designed to test the feasibility and obtain preliminary data on the effectiveness of the task-oriented training no formal measures of disease activity were incorporated to interpret the effects of an intervention. Furthermore, findings from this pilot trial cannot be generalized without
documenting the baseline disease activity state of the study participants. These are study limitations. However, maintaining the DASH inclusion criterion score between 25 and 50 will help to include people presenting with same level of self reported symptoms and level of difficulty in activities and participation, irrespective of the type of arthritis.