Reviewer's report

Title: Peer volunteers in an integrative pain management program for frail older adults with chronic pain: study protocol for a single group trial

Version: 2 Date: 9 April 2014

Reviewer: Kelli Allen

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript nicely describes a pilot study that will examine the addition of peer volunteers to an established pain management program for older adults, to help support long-term adherence. The background sets up the protocol well, and overall the paper is well written. There are, however, minor grammatical issues throughout, and there are some places where there is repetition across sections. A careful review for these issues would be helpful.

I have the following recommendations for clarifying and strengthening the manuscript:

Abstract:
1. Discussion section states that older adults “do not prefer taking pain medications.” While it is likely true that many adults prefer not to take pain medications, this statement may be stated in too general of a manner, since it is also likely not true of all older adults.

Background
1. 3rd paragraph, 2nd sentence, same comment as above related to a generalized statement about older adults’ preferences regarding medication use.
2. 7th paragraph, 2nd sentence seems to start referring to one particular study. If that is the case, what “interventions” are being referred to here? In general it may be helpful to be clearer that this sentence is talking about the study that you continue to describe in the next couple of sentence.
3. 7th paragraph, last sentence, how are the results of “enhanced long-term maintenance of physical activity” and “significantly more physical activity….after 18 months” different?
4. 8th paragraph, 2nd sentence, recommend removing “showed a tendency for” and just stating that the peer group had a 27% decrease… Perhaps the statement of “tendency” is referring to a lack of statistically significant difference, but the way it’s worded here doesn’t seem completely correct.
5. 10th paragraph, 1st sentence, recommend removing or changing the word “effectiveness” since a preliminary study like this really doesn’t test effectiveness.
6. 10th paragraph, I’m not sure what is meant by a “dose-response relationship.” This is described later, but typically a dose-response relationship refers to how much of an intervention someone received (e.g., people who received the whole intervention vs. drop out before completion), rather than the time-course of
changes, as it seems to mean here. Recommend revising this terminology here and later in the manuscript. Minimally, explain clearly up front what you mean by dose-response in this context.

Methods
1. Recommend adding a brief description of how participants will be recruited.
2. Describe whether there may be a ‘learning effect’ or other potential methodological issues with repeating the measures so many times during the intervention.
3. Data analysis section – explain what is meant by “mid-intervention effect.”
4. Describe how any issues of non-normal data will be handled (e.g., alternatives to a t-test).

Discussion
1. The overall goal of this research is to see if the PV’s help with long-term adherence. This study involves 12 weeks of measurement, which is not long-term. While this is fine for a pilot study since the real assessment is on feasibility, I recommend noting a limitation regarding the duration of the study, particularly related to its ability to assess long-term changes.
2. 2nd paragraph states that if the study is positive, PVs should be integrated… However, this is only a pilot study, and the true effectiveness will be evaluated in a larger trial. Therefore this remark should probably be revised a bit.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.