Reviewer's report

Title: Characteristics of study subjects willing to participate in a randomized controlled behavioral clinical trial using home-based personal computers and a webcam

Version: 4
Date: 24 February 2014

Reviewer: Osvaldo Almeida

Reviewer's report:

1. The manuscript describes the design of a trial of social interaction for older people with no or mild cognitive impairment living in retirement villages or in contact with community centres. How well does this sampling frame represent the population of older adults living in the community? How could this affect the generalisability/external validity of future findings of the study?

2. Description of the control intervention lacks detail. What type of stimuli are used to trigger conversations? How are the calls scheduled, structured, recorded, coded? What variables have the investigators sought to control compared with the web-based intervention?

3. Commitment/interest cannot be easily measured by a single question? Do the investigators have any data to support the validity of this assessment? Are they suggesting that non-participants are characterised predominantly by low commitment and low interest? Is there any evidence that this is indeed the case?

4. I have the impression that the authors of this manuscript were trying to do two things at the same time: describe their intervention protocol and report the results of the ‘interest/commitment’ analyses. I wonder whether the structure of the paper needs to be revised to clearly outline these two aims: (1) describe the protocol of an intervention designed to investigate how face-to-face conversations compare with telephone conversations in relation to cognitive function and well being after 12 weeks, (2) report basic sociodemographic and clinical characteristics of participants who consent to screening and answer the questions about interest and contact details (please include information about cognitive outcomes, if available). If the authors do not wish to report these data, please consider focusing on aim (1) only.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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