Reviewer's report

**Title:** Enhanced Relapse Prevention for Bipolar Disorder: A qualitative investigation of value perceived for service users and care coordinators

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 10 April 2008

**Reviewer:** Ben Heaven

**Reviewer's report:**

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

  # None

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

  1) The authors set out a clear argument for the purpose of their research. In particular they emphasise that the study is the first to investigate the perspective of service users and care co-ordinators regarding the value of enhanced relapse prevention (ERP) for the management of bipolar disorder. Consequently the paper appears to offer a useful contribution to the literature concerned with the treatment and management of this condition.

  The methods employed by the researchers are clearly explained and details of their sample are presented with clear tables. The information included under the heading ‘analysis’ is particularly welcome. However I have several minor concerns. On page 7 the authors state that;

  “In order to prevent the researcher from being perceived as part of the ERP training intervention, the qualitative research team were not located in the trial office and the researcher was employed by a different funding body”.

  I think the issue of separating the identity of the qualitative team from that of the trial team is a very interesting and important aspect of the methods used in this study. Qualitative studies that are embedded in trials present a number of technical and methodological difficulties, and it is good to see the authors have described their efforts to negotiate these barriers. However, I’m unclear from the text how the location of the qualitative team’s offices or their source of funding would be pertinent to the interviewees. Perhaps for half the participants (the care-coordinators) these details would be salient? A clearer description on these points would be useful.

  2) In the conclusion to the paper the authors refer to May’s (2006) work in regard to the normalization process model (NPM). However I do not recall the model being discussed in the methods section of the paper. Its citation in the
conclusions appears as though it has been included as an afterthought rather than as an influential contribution to the process of analysis. Nevertheless, the authors conclude their paper with the following;

“ERP was valued by CCs and SU’s so if the ERP intervention is supported by services in the other ways that May [22] outlines, then its implementation could be sustained in community mental health teams in NHS secondary care mental health services”.

This statement suggests that “the other ways” that the intervention may or may not be supported, as set out by May, are regarded as rather crucial factors by the authors. Consequently it is strange that they do not describe these other factors in their paper.

3) The results and discussion sections overall are written quite clearly, although there are a few sentences that require work. The first sentence of the conclusions is particularly muddled. It’s clear that the authors’ intention was to summarise their findings, but more time should be spent on checking the grammatical construction of sentences. I have added a list of possible corrections below which I hope the authors will find helpful.

4) Page 5-6, sentence at bottom of page beginning ‘The perceived value’; this sentence should be re-written, it currently does not make sense.

5) Page 29, table 2; minor typo under the heading ‘group’ where a capital U for the word ‘usual’ has been used.

6) In my view the conclusions should be rewritten. The first sentence in particular does not make grammatical sense.

• Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

1. The nature of bipolar disorder and the way in which ERP works could have been explained in slightly more detail, either in the text, or by moving table 1 a paragraph ‘up the page’. The paper’s introduction is written clearly. However, as a minor point, I think the nature of bipolar disorder and the way in which ERP works could have been explained in slightly more detail, either in the text, or by moving table 1 a paragraph ‘up the page’. I had to refer to table 1 to understand that the intervention would be carried out separately for the different symptoms of depression, mania and mixed episodes, and that its effectiveness varied across these symptom categories. The current placement of table one meant that the argument had progressed beyond this point by the time the table was introduced. Indeed the quote on page 11 from service user 14 summarised my own thoughts in reading the introduction; “… I didn’t know there were all different parts to the illness”. As a reader who has almost no knowledge of BD, having these basic facts set out early in the paper makes it easier to follow the core argument and the nature of the ERP intervention.
2. Page 2 in the abstract under the heading ‘results’: it is unclear in the last sentence whether both CCs and SU’s held reservations, or specifically SUs.

3. Page 4, paragraph 1, sentence beginning ‘RP interventions’; the word ‘increasing’ could be repeated before the term ‘social processing’ to clarify the nature of the effect.

4. Page 4, paragraph 1, sentence beginning ‘The effectiveness of interventions’; this sentence could include comers or be broken down as it is currently quite hard to follow.

5. Page 6, first paragraph, sentence beginning ‘if an intervention’; the word ‘will’ could be inserted between ‘certainly’ and ‘be’ in the final sentence.

6. Page 6 second paragraph, sentence beginning ‘Value is’; I’m not sure if the word ‘where’ is appropriate in the context of the sentence.

7. Page 7, first paragraph, second sentence; The word ‘participants’ is used to describe SU involved in the trial, but elsewhere the same term is used to describe both SU’s and CC’s.

8. Page 8, sentence beginning ‘This was achieved in two ways’; the words ‘categorised as’ or similar might be inserted between the words ‘and themes’ if I am reading the sentence correctly and understanding the process that the authors are describing. (i.e. the sentence would read “… perspectives of SU and CC were explored and categorised as themes in the final analysis …”.

9. Page 12, first paragraph under the heading ‘Developed ways of working …’; I think the points made in this paragraph are valid but they appear a bit self evident in the way they are presented.

10. Page 12, third paragraph, sentence beginning ‘Particularly when SUs’; this sentence seems a bit disjointed.

11. Page 14, sentence beginning ‘However, mostly, CCs’; I’m not sure why this sentence begins ‘however’ as it appears to support the previous point rather than challenging it.

12. Page 15, second paragraph; it would be useful to have a reminder of what TAU refers to, as this is only mentioned earlier in the paper.

13. Page 15-16; There are a lot of quotes from CC regarding why they viewed the action plan as being more useful in an ERP approach, rather than the ‘treatment as usual’ arm of the trial. It would be helpful to have more data presented from the perspective of the SU’s here as this seems to be an important point.

14. Page 17, sentence beginning ‘As a consequence’; do the authors mean to use the words ‘behaviour as ERP’ or ‘behaviour through ERP’?
15. Page 23; the authors summarise some of the advantages and disadvantages of ERP as identified by CC and SUs. The issue of SU's becoming more dependant on individual CC's is not reiterated and may be an important issue in some contexts.

16. Page 25; Final sentence on first paragraph; the authors comment that a particular strength of their study was that interviews were conducted until data saturation was obtained. However this seems to be a marker of good standard practice rather than a particular strength of the study. The comment also undermines the real strengths of the research by seeming to concentrate on fundamental but otherwise unremarkable points. Generally however, the authors have presented a good case for the unique value of their work.

**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