Reviewer’s report

Title: Chronic Headache Education and Self-management Study (CHESS) - a mixed method feasibility study to inform the design of a randomised controlled trial

Version: 0 Date: 31 Aug 2018

Reviewer: Shawn M. Kneipp

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Overall, this is a much-needed area of study and intervention development, and I applaud the research team for taking on this work. The feasibility assessment was comprehensive in terms of examining 4 key areas needed to support a large trial, and is a strength of the work. Another strength of the work is the inclusion of a lay advisory group.

Despite this, there are a few fundamental concerns that warrant re-examining the purpose of the manuscript, and what it can contribute to the literature that is new.

First, while the comprehensiveness of the feasibility domains is an overall strength of the research, explaining all of these domains in a single manuscript limits the detail that directly relates to the methods used (which is the focus of this journal). In an initial read, it seems the manuscript tries to do and cover too much territory. This also causes problems for the amount of background information that can be provided -- where there is only a cursory or superficial attention given to each of the 4 areas of interest.

Second, and probably a consequence of the first issue raised here, some of the methods described have been published in detail elsewhere, while others have not. Specifically, the classification interview methods seem to have been published in detail elsewhere. However, assessing the feasibility of the PROMs using cognitive interviewing is not well-described in terms of cognitive interviewing, and the use of the SmartPhone App as a method are only briefly mentioned. There is a whole literature and skill level required to conduct cognitive interviews, and it isn't clear whether the accepted principles of (see, for instance, NCI's website on this) and training needed to conduct the cognitive interviews was carried out according to these standards. Similarly, there is an entire literature around daily/weekly journaling of symptoms (and the accuracy thereof), relative to newer methods that might incorporate an Ecological Momentary Assessment approach, for example.

Third, there are at least two areas in the manuscript where the authors go out of their way to explain why a full pilot study was not conducted. This seems unnecessary, as the rationale for completing all of the aspects of feasibility that are needed is sound and justifiable. It is not clear whether a pilot was not planned or conducted at all but seems to be the case, as the there is reference to a trial that had just recently begun in the conclusion. It seems defensible to not have conducted a full pilot at the same time as the feasibility study, but that is different from suggesting a pilot is not needed at all. Be clear on this point.
Finally -- unrelated to the comprehensiveness of what was covered . . . the authors seem to sweep over or ignore what was found by participants around time constraints and giving feedback that an additional half day might be too burdensome, and then moving forward with adding an entire day of the intervention based on the nurse delivery feedback for testing in the RCT. Why did the intervention delivery recommendation supercede the participant feedback? The rationale is not clear and yet this is a critical component of the delivery.

Given these points, it seems reasonable to think more about what new (and sufficiently in-depth) is presented that could be useful for researchers in the way of methods. It might be better to focus on a more detailed methods paper describing one of these 4 areas (i.e., the PROMs and cognitive interviewing) as the focal point of the paper, rather than trying to present a very broad view of all feasibility components.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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