Reviewer’s report

Title: Singapore Tele-technology Aided Rehabilitation in Stroke (STARS) trial: Protocol of a Randomized Clinical Trial on Tele-rehabilitation for stroke patients

Version: 4  Date: 21 July 2015

Reviewer: Denise Taylor

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Major Compulsory Revisions

• The primary hypothesis is around functional recovery based on LLDFI. Secondary outcomes are: increased time with a therapist, improved balance, enhanced QoL, decreased health service utilisation, reduced caregiver burden, and an evaluation of sustainability of improvements at 6 months. This don’t match the earlier stated (L172) aim to “determine if a novel Tele-rehabilitation intervention can improve participation in rehabilitation and functional recovery of post-stroke patients, and evaluate its cost-effectiveness”.

The interpretation of ‘participation’ is not consistent with the ICF notion of participation (see www.who.int/classifications/icf/en), which tries to understand a person’s participation in their normal work and social roles, it is not about adherence to an exercise programme. I would suggest replacing ‘participation’ with ‘adherence’, which is also an important component of rehabilitation programmes.

• Randomisation may be better to occur after baseline assessment, not prior to baseline assessment.

This decision to maintain randomisation prior to baseline assessment is a problem, it has the potential to increase bias. If at all possible I would advise changing it. If not possible it needs to be clearly stated as a weakness in the study design. In my opinion it is well worth re-considering as it may limit your ability to publish the completed trial.

• Clarify the time since stroke, is it the first 3 months after stroke that the person receives the intervention or is it for 3 months following discharge?

Author Response: Patients will receive the intervention for 3 months following discharge. To make this clearer, the phrase “3 months after stroke” has been changed to “3 months after stroke admission” throughout the text.

Reviewer response: “3 months after stroke admission is not the same as “3 months following discharge”. This still needs to be clarified.
Minor Revision
Check spelling on ClinicalTrials.gov under trial registration.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests