Reviewer’s report

Title: Readiness to change and therapy outcomes of an innovative psychotherapy program for surgical patients: Results from a randomized controlled trial

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Reviewer: Patrizia Zeppegno

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Readiness to change and therapy outcomes of an innovative psychotherapy program for surgical patients: Results from a randomized controlled trial

MAJOR REVISIONS

* In light of your previous publications exactly about this study, please check for the possible overlaps.

* In the whole text, especially in the introduction, methods and statistical analysis, you use several expressions in quotes which refer to items of questionnaire for the evaluation of patients and other documents or programmes: these statements and make it difficult to understand, above all if you don't specify the list of items from which you have selected those expressions.

* Add a running title

* Suggestion for the revision of the keywords list:

Keywords: cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), motivational interview, surgical patients, Bridging Intervention in Anesthesiology (BRIA), University of Rhode Island Change Assessment (URICA)

Abstract

* Please consider making the methods section clearer, describing with more detail the main pre and post-surgery steps.

* Starting the abstract with a specific kind of psychotherapy without a previous more general introductory statement makes the paper difficult to frame.

* You use the same acronym "BRIA" for saying both "Bridging Intervention in Anesthesiology" and "psychotherapy sessions combining Motivational Interviewing with cognitive behavioral therapy". Does BRIA consist in "psychotherapy sessions combining..."
Motivational Interviewing with cognitive-behavioural therapy? It's not clear reading your abstract.

* About the conclusions of the abstract (and your study) can you actually say that BRIA "may particularly be effective in patients with a variety of mental disorders and low readiness to change"? Is it not a specific result just in surgical patients affected with mixed psychiatric comorbidities?

* You may rephrase the Background as follows: Background: Bridging Intervention in Anesthesiology (BRIA) is a stepped care program that aims at motivating and supporting surgical patients with mental disorders to engage in psychosocial mental health care.

* You may rephrase as follows:

Methods: We performed a secondary analysis on data from a recent randomized controlled trial (published by our research group) including 220 surgical patients with diverse comorbid mental disorders.

* You may rephrase as follows:

We investigated whether readiness to change moderated outcome differences between two motivational interventions (MI) with different intensity: (1) psychotherapy sessions combining MI with cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and (2) no psychotherapy / computerized brief written advice (BWA) only.

* You may rephrase as follows:

The most frequent mental disorders were mood, anxiety, substance use and adjustment disorders according… (add the diagnostic criteria employed for the diagnosis es DSM-IV-TR)

* You may rephrase as follows:

Conclusions: Readiness to change may act as moderator of the efficacy of psychosocial therapy. Combination of MI and CBT may be effective particularly in patients with a variety of mental disorders and low readiness to change.

Introduction

* You should explain how much the role of readiness to change is important in the psychotherapeutic intervention you speak about.

* Please better explain TTM and BRIA and the context of the program. You explain it below in the paper but it is better to put it here. It's not clear the explanation about the BWA (page 5, line 42-51) and the structure of phrase which tries to describe it. Can you consider the BWA a "motivational intervention" comparable to BRIA? Why if it's just a
way to collect data about the psychological distress without any psychological intervention? You don't sufficiently explain it. What do you exactly mean with "psychological distress"? How did you determine it?

Consider rephrasing: Motivational readiness to change is a central component of the transtheoretical model of change (TTM), this framework comprises five stages that people move through when they experience behaviour changes: 1) pre-contemplation 2) contemplation, 3) preparation 4) action and 5) maintenance, each of them contributing to the multifaceted construct of motivational readiness to change.

We applied this model to explore the relations between pre-treatment stages of change and treatment outcomes in psychosocial therapy

Consider rephrasing: The findings of several studies suggest that motivational readiness to change is positively associated with pretreatment severity of problems and symptoms of those disorders for which patients seek therapy

Hence, the relations between readiness to change and psychotherapy outcomes may also be influenced by baseline psychological distress of patients.

Add a reference from the literature for this statement or introduce it with: "We argue or we hypothesize that…"

Consider rephrasing: A previous pilot study conducted by our research group showed feasibility of integrating BRIA into a surgical setting [36]. Afterword we recently performed randomized controlled trial (RCT) including 220 participants, BRIA psychotherapy sessions proved to be superior to the comparison intervention which did not include therapy sessions and consisted only of brief written computerized advice (BWA) based on patients' results of computer-assisted screening for psychological distress in the first step of the program [37]

Please explicitly describe the eligibility criteria.

Materials and Methods

It could be useful dividing the paragraph "Study Design, Setting and Patients" in the three respective different paragraphs.

Page 6, line 17 "secondary" has an unclear meaning.

Which eligibility criteria are you referring to (at page 6, Line 40)? If they are following ones in the same sentence, you should probably point out them in a systematic way not incidentally.
Which is the "semistructured clinical interview" you are referring to? Why did you choose "Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule"? All mental disorders except anxiety are excluded from this evaluation.

In Table 1 you refer to "multiple-choice questions" not listed here neither in the text: the attachment of this questionnaire could be useful for a better comprehension of your evaluation.

You should add the methodological informations (page 7, line 11-18) in this paper without referring to another study, although yours.

"Therapy engagement" paragraph: It could be useful to make a scheme or to describe the engagement in a more schematic way.

You mentioned different kinds of assessment in the methods paragraph and in the introduction. Could you merge the questionnaires administered and the procedures followed in your study just in one section? In order to simplify it, you could add a table including these informations.

Why didn't you have the aim to describe the results for different psychiatric diagnosis or organic diagnosis for which these patients underwent surgery in no way? It could be a good point to involve in the explanation of role of readiness to change in a specific kind of patients.

Consider rephrasing: The full details of the setting, eligibility criteria, patient recruitment, randomization, concealment of allocation and blinding, psychological and medical measurements, sample size calculation, data collection and analyses, as well as results of primary analyses are available elsewhere in our previous publication [37].

In this phase, therapists used diverse established manuals for CBT of specific disorders

Consider rephrasing: They chose basic interventions that they considered as adequate for the patients' current psychological conditions and specific disorders, and that would be easy to integrate in subsequent therapies

Discussion

You do not mention the impact of your intervention in patients affected with the different psychiatric disorders.

Page 17, Line 6-18: could you expand this concept in a more clear way?
The general procedures of the stepped care approach are documented in the unpublished study protocol, which is part of the application for approval by the ethics committee. I suggest to provide free or on demand access to the "unpublished study protocol" to ensure an higher level transparency.

A team of certified psychologists delivered the BRIA sessions. Add the kind of certification of the psychologists enrolled.

established CBT manuals for diverse mental disorders. Add the references of these: "established CBT manuals for diverse mental disorders"

Moderation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS. Add the version of SPSS employed (21, 22…) and the reference as indicated by IBM website (https://www-01.ibm.com/support/docview.wss?uid=swg21476197):


Availability of Data and Materials: Datasets of this study are not publicly available because study participants did not give their approval. Add this to the limitations of the study.

MINOR REVISIONS

Could be useful to use the acronym "RC" instead of "readiness to change" to avoid several repetitions in the text?

In the whole text, you should write just the references without "e.g." before them in parenthesis as in page 4, Line 38-40.

Page 7, Line 57: What is "php based on a mysql database"? You suppose an unobvious meaning

Page 10, Line 53-60 and Page 11, Line 1-7: Any references about your choice to adopt this kind of interventions?

Page 11, Line 7: "therapists were encouraged to put the major focus on motivational interventions and to combine them…”sounds better.
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.

I recommend additional statistical review

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

Acceptable

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Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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