Reviewer’s report

Title: Evaluation of a collaborative care model for integrated primary care of common mental disorders comorbid with chronic conditions in South Africa

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Reviewer: José Caldas de Almeida

Reviewer’s report:

The theme of the study is of utmost importance in mental health services research nowadays. The effectiveness of collaborative care models for mental disorders has already been confirmed in many countries, and integrated care programmes for chronic diseases and comorbid mental disorders have also been tested in some places. However, most of these last studies have been developed almost exclusively in high income countries, and the implementation of these programmes continues to be very limited worldwide. Therefore, evaluations of this type of interventions, are most needed in LMICS and may contribute to respond to research and organizational questions that are extremely relevant not only in LMICS but also in all countries where an increasing number of chronic diseases is frequently associated with mental disorders, and where the traditional models of care are not able to diminish the existing treatment gap associated to these disorders.

The study has two specific objectives: the assessment of the capacity of the collaborative care package to improve detection of depressive and AUD in chronic care patients; and the assessment of the capacity to reduce depressive symptoms and improve functioning in screen positive patients identified and referred for care within the stepped up collaborative care model.

The title expresses well these objectives and the abstract gives an accurate and comprehensive view of the different parts of the paper.

In order to attain these two objectives, the study in reality includes two different parts, what contributes to its significant complexity; and was developed under real world conditions, a fact that had important methodological implications. For instance, the sample of the first part of the study was not randomized, and in the cohort study the recruitment into the intervention and control arm could not also be randomized. Despite these constraints, the authors were able to formulate a design that is appropriate to the main purposes of the two parts of the study.

The population and methods are adequately described, although in relation to some issues (e.g. the description of the collaborative care package), the reader interested in more detailed information has to get most of this information in other papers previously published by the authors.

The description of the procedures, samples and measures of both components of the study is clear, rigorous and comprehensive, and the statistical analysis that were carried out were adequate and well described.
The results are correctly presented, and well supported by tables and figures.

In the discussion, the authors highlight the favorable outcomes of both components of the study - the improvement of detection of depressive and AUD symptoms by nurses following the implementation of the collaborative care package, and the greater chance of patients identified and referred to further care of having a reduction of depressive symptoms and functional disability than those that were not referred.

They also correctly address the questions related to the large treatment gap that still remained after the implementation of the package. On this specific issue, although the authors discuss the factors that have been presented by other authors to explain the large percentage of undetected cases at the follow-up, a presentation of their own explanations of these limitations of the results would enhance the value of the discussion.

The study has some limitations (e.g. the lack of randomization above mentioned and the lack of control clinics in the assessment of detection of mental disorders) but they are recognized and correctly addressed by the authors.

The conclusions are based on the results obtained in the two parts of the study and are clearly formulated.

In summary, in my view, this is an excellent paper, that addresses a relevant theme, based on a solid background, and that is well structured and well written. It gives a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge in the field and, in my opinion, only needs a couple of minor corrections.

At 106, the sentence "Details of the collaborative care package was developed……" should be corrected, either adding that after package or deleting was.

At 398, I suggest to withdraw the numbering i) as this is not followed by ii).

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes
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 am able to assess the statistics

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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