Reviewer’s report

Title: Effectiveness of physical therapy treatment in addition to usual podiatry management of plantar heel pain: A randomized clinical trial

Version: 0 Date: 15 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Todd Davenport

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting manuscript. The manuscript describes a randomized clinical trial, which compared clinical outcomes of patients with plantar heel pain who received usual podiatric care with a group of patients with plantar heel pain who received physical therapy intervention in addition to usual podiatric care. The manuscript was free of major errors in diction and grammar, was easy to understand, and appeared formatted appropriately for the submission type indicated by the journal. The topic is important because plantar heel pain is a relatively common and severe source of morbidity among people with foot and ankle pain. Identification of appropriate interventions and health service provision seems important to ensure appropriate and cost-effective clinical outcomes for patients.

MAJOR COMMENTS

It seems notable that physical therapists do not "own" all the interventions that patients received as part of the study, and some may have been provided by podiatrists during usual care. The authors may comment on the extent to which the profession matters who provides the care, relative to patients being provided the evidence-based care itself.

Practice patterns for podiatrists likely vary in terms of referral to physical therapists. Thus, some evidence to support the moniker "usual podiatric care" seems warranted, because there seemed to be substantial variation in this study.

Building on the previous point, the mean number of visits with a physical therapist actually was greater in the uPOD group compared to the uPOD+PT group (difference not statistically significant). However, it appears the mean was potentially influenced by outliers, because only 11 patients in the uPOD group received physical therapy. The authors should comment on the potential effects of frequency of physical therapy in the uPOD and uPOD+PT groups, because the groups do not seem mutually exclusive. The authors also may consider presenting the results of a subgroup analysis in which the 11 patients who resemble the uPOD+PT group within the uPOD group are excluded, although the reviewer acknowledges this analysis may be underpowered based on the authors' sample size calculation.

The authors helpfully cite their clinical trial protocol (https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT01865734). It appears there is a deviation from protocol that may be reasonable but not discussed. In the protocol, reference is made to "early physical therapy." However, this reference was dropped from this manuscript, so it is unclear whether the deviation was just semantic or may have more substantively influenced the study hypotheses or interpretation. The authors should explain this and any other deviations from their proposed protocol.
The authors clearly define the definition for "completers" of uPOD+PT, but the definition applied for uPOD is unclear. The authors should clarify this definition.

A value of CPT data is the potential to associate direct costs of evaluation/interventions with the respective groups. However, cost effectiveness was not addressed in this study. The authors may consider inclusion of cost effectiveness analysis as part of the study, or could indicate where, in the presence of statistically similar results for the primary outcome measure between groups, cost effectiveness analysis could further assist in treatment and referral decisions based on the data presented in this study.

MINOR COMMENTS

Page 8, line 7: Please change "principle" to "principal."

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.

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

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

Acceptable

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