Reviewer’s report

Title: Feasibility and long-term efficacy of a proactive health program in the treatment of chronic back pain: a randomized controlled trial

Version: 0 Date: 27 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?

Yes - there is a clear objective

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?

No - there are minor issues

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?

No - there are minor issues

Statistics - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?

No - there are issues with the statistics in the study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?

Yes - the author's interpretation is reasonable

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?

Probably - with minor revisions

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS: The study was well thought and it addresses an important area of health that needs attention. The authors were able to subject patients with persistent back pain to an intervention for duration of 2 years. The recruitment and allocation to groups was okay. But
considering best practice, administering exercises to back pain patients without stratifying whether is low back pain or middle or upper back needs clarification. It was also not clear if screening was done to know the type of low back pain e.g non specific. Also the control group was given usual care according to instructions of their health care provider which may not be the same in all the participants. The extent to which the German guideline for low back pain management was observed was also not clear. In the methodology, it was observed that the authors did not blind the participants. This would have been the cause of high drop out in the population of participants due of bias.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:

Design: The design should be blinded RCT. Execution: in the aspect of methodology, they will need to explain in detail the types of usual care and intervention that were given and they have to be standardized and the duration, frequency and intensity should be explicit. Statistical analysis: the result section did not consider across the year comparison and comparison of outcomes within each group.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS:

The methodology, should be looked into. The aspect of intervention given to the control group, blinding was supposed to have been considered, and the intervention that lasted for 23 hours raised a lot of concern. The intervention should have been described appropriately and even references provided for the exercises. More appropriately the protocol for the exercise and the standard usual care.

Note: This reviewer report can be downloaded - see attached pdf file.

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.

No

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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No