Author’s response to reviews

Title: TALKING TIME: A pilot randomized controlled trial investigating social support for informal caregivers via the telephone

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Author’s response to reviews:

BMC Health Services Research
Editorial Board
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Dear Editor,

Please find enclosed our revised paper entitled “TALKING TIME: A pilot randomized controlled trial investigating social support for informal caregivers via the telephone” (Manuscript ID: BHSR-D-19-02036R2) by Martin Nikolaus Dichter, Bernd Albers, Diana Trutschel, Armin Michael Ströbel, Swantje Seismann-Petersen, Katharina Wermke, Margareta Halek, and Martin Berwig.

We thank the editorial team and the reviewers for their helpful comments and hope the article is now suitable for publication.

With kind regards
Yours sincerely,

Martin Nikolaus Dichter on behalf of all co-authors
Technical Comments:
Please Add a Declaration header and reorder the declarations so that they are in the following format:

- Ethics approval and consent to participate
- Consent for publication
- Availability of data and material
- Competing interests
- Funding
- Authors' contributions
- Acknowledgements

Author Comments:
Changed as proposed.

Reviewers Comments
Abstract 44-52—the Results section of the abstract should focus on and identify the primary outcome of self-rated psychological health-related quality of life (the fact that this metric is identified in the Methods and Discussion but not the Results is somewhat confusing to the reader).

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have updated the results section of the abstract as follows: “After three months, the Talking Time intervention group demonstrated an increase in the self-rated psychological HRQoL scores, whereas the scores decreased in the control group. However, the standardized effect size of 1.65 (95% Confidence Interval: -0.44 – 3.75) was not significant.”

Reviewers Comments
Background 85-87—this sentence seems to need a citation(s).

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have updated the sentence as follows: “However, a recent review demonstrated the potential benefit of such intervention while also highlighting the generally inconsistent results. Therefore, this review recommend the performance of further high quality trials is recommended [5].”

Reviewers Comments
Background 116-117—the authors seem to draw a distinction with the clause "in the foreground" but then do not identify the contrasting information. Either this phrase should be dropped or there needs to be a parallel in the sentence structure.

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have changed the corresponding sentences: “That means that the focus of the intervention In the foreground is the reciprocal exchange of experience between informal caregivers and also as well as joint learning.”

Reviewers Comments
Methods—given that the study is designed to evaluate self-rated psychological health-related quality of life among other important outcomes, it would be of importance to understand whether other types of informal caregiver support may have influence beyond the TALKING TIME intervention. In the previous round, this reviewer inquired as to whether any of the informal caregivers were receiving additional support such as periods of respite or participation in day-programs. If this information is simply not available for this phase of testing that is understandable but going forward the authors might wish to include and control for such factors.

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have changed the manuscript section “Strengths and limitations”:
“Fourth, apart from the Talking Time intervention we have not assessed additional types (e.g. respite care) of informal caregiver support during the intervention phase. For a future trial we recommend that this data are collected during the intervention period.
Fifth Fourth, information regarding individual actions of each informal caregiver to participate in the telephone-based social support groups and the consequences of the Talking Time intervention for the respective care arrangement can only be answered after the analysis of the process evaluation data.”

Reviewers Comments
Discussion 421-423—the authors might also include first person testimonials (either written or short videos) from prior participants in their future recruitment efforts

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have changed our recommendations for a future trial (manuscript discussion section):
“First, we recommend the inclusion of more recruitment centers and financial funding for public relations strategies targeting informal caregivers and their relatives with dementia who are living at home. Second, if possible, informal caregivers who participated in this study should be integrated as testimonials for the recruitment of study participants in a future trial.
Third, the participation of informal caregivers as part of the planning team for a future trial and especially for the planning of the recruitment approach is recommended.
Fourth, recruitment materials or media for a future trial, such as a trial website or a folder, should include a detailed description of the intervention and the inclusion and exclusion criteria in plain language. The fact that the intervention was group-based seems to have had no effect on recruitment.”

Reviewers Comments
Discussion 425-429—would advise the authors to not identify the process evaluation that is not reported in this manuscript as a study strength.

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have changed the manuscript section “Strengths and limitations”:
The main strengths of our trial are that it is the first evaluation of the Talking Time intervention based on a rigorous experimental design. and a process evaluation as part of the trial (in preparation).

Reviewers Comments
Conclusion lines 480-483—"satisfaction…with the intervention" should perhaps not be equated with having one's needs met. These are important yet different constructs that should be identified separately.

Author Comments
Based on the reviewer’s comment, we have changed the corresponding sentences: “The fidelity results will provide information on the satisfaction of the study participants with the intervention components and on thus the extent to which the intervention meets the needs of informal caregivers of people with dementia.”