Reviewer's report

Title: Implementing an Outreaching, Preference-led Stepped Care Intervention Programme to Reduce Late Life Depressive Symptoms: Results of a Mixed-methods Study

Version: 1 Date: 12 May 2014

Reviewer: Gerdien Franx

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The question is not new but well defined, although I do have a concern about the stepped-care part of the title, see under 2.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work? Discretionary Revisions.

Yes, I think the description of the method is done thoroughly. One reflection concerning the title and focus of the study. The staged implementation is very appealing but in this case it incurred a total change of the protocol. The stepped care approach was (rightly) abandoned halfway through the study, because of high drop-out rates. Considering this crucial change, I wonder if the authors can still say that they examined a stepped care approach in the latter clusters? Perhaps the focus of the study gradually became the implementation of a screening and patient centered (because of the explicit match with the patient’s needs) early intervention programme for the elderly?

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes. Although I am not familiar with the standards to report mixed methods studies, I find that the authors have very successfully integrated the qualitative and quantitative information.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Minor Essential Revisions.

Partly. Please check the first sentence of the conclusion which states that the intervention was effective compared to usual care, which was not the case since the comparison condition was no care at all.

In the conclusion I do miss some acknowledgment of a wider range of studies in this area, which all conclude that universal prevention of depression programme, with a screening component addressing an entire population, is not effective and should not be rolled out in daily practice. This is an important finding in the Dutch
context of insurers gradually making screening procedures mandatory in primary care.

In their recommendations, the authors understandably state that new approaches to reach the depressed elderly population need to be found. Can they do some suggestions for this based on the rich qualitative information they gathered?

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Discretionary Revisions.
See remarks under 2.

Yes, except for some citations which could be made less Double Dutch. Of more importance is the repetitive use of the words ‘elderly people’ or ‘elderly people’, underscoring a stangeness of that particular patient group. Please replace by more neutral terms as respondents or participants, as one would do in other adult research.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests