Reviewer's report

Title: Using a systematic review in clinical decision making: a pilot parallel, randomized controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 23 June 2015

Reviewer: Stephanie Archer

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Introduction:
1. There seems to be a big jump between the outcomes of your systematic review and the development of your intervention – you need to add some more information in here to act as a bridge as it is unclear how you got from one to the other, and what the process is for making the shortened review (even if it’s brief); I can see from the later sections that you have included this in the description of the pilot study – a summary sentence(s) of this would be useful in the introduction.

2. The title describes the study as a pilot parallel, randomised controlled trial, but the paragraph towards the end of the introduction describes that “The purpose of the full-scale randomized controlled trial...”. Although I see that you explain further down in this section that the study presented in this manuscript is a pilot for the larger proposed project, I think this needs to be made clear at the start of the section – I don’t think you need to do much new writing, just a bit of re-organising of this section.

Methods:
3. I assume that participants were also asked about their knowledge of the chosen systematic review prior to participation; if not, this could be a major confound if some participants had read the journal article before participating.

Overall:
4. This is a well presented paper, but you need to make a stronger case as to why you need to pilot these specific issues in the introduction. I understand that the MRC says that you should do pilots for a variety of reasons, but the case for testing these aspects prior to a trial needs to be made explicit and supported with appropriate evidence regarding need.

Minor Essential Revisions

Methods:
1. The sentence that starts “we chose a full-length systematic review...” needs to be shortened – it is too long and a bit wordy.
2. An enhanced explanation of the sample would be useful
3. The intervention section states that participants were asked to read the document in Figure 1 – as far as I can see, this is the CONSORT diagram?
4. It would be useful if you could state why twice as many participants were allocated to the control group.
5. You need to say a bit more about the two assessors so we can establish their suitability for this task.
6. It would be useful to say how many consented to participate in the study before you say how many dropped out and how may completed. Maybe you could direct them to the CONSORT flow diagram here?

Results:
7. The following changes would help this part of the results section “This area was re-developed so that [the assessment of] each individual participant’s answers could be saved before moving on to the next submission.
8. You either need to explain how you came up with the figures in the rate of recruitment part of the manuscript, or you need to direct readers to the appropriate appendix.
9. The sentence that starts “The participants that were locked out (but finished the study) were not used...” needs some punctuation – it is too long.

Discretionary Revisions

Introduction:
1. The use of “online medical product” is somewhat confusing.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests