Reviewer’s report

Title: Feasibility and acceptability of two incentive-based implementation strategies for mental health therapists implementing cognitive-behavioral therapy: a pilot study to inform a randomized controlled trial

Version: 0 Date: 29 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Margaret McConnell

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes the results of a feasibility and acceptability analysis of using financial and social rewards for therapist adherence to evidence based practices in cognitive therapy. The paper finds that both types of rewards are feasible and acceptable and sees suggestive evidence that the financial incentive may be more effective than the social reward.

I enjoyed reading the paper. The evidence is novel and the study is carefully explained.

I have a few concerns about particular elements of the study design and how the affect the interpretation of results. The implementation study took place over a very short period of time. The results seem to suggest very high initial adherence to EBT with a steady and significant downward trend over time. This raises significant questions whether either financial or social rewards could be sustained over a realistic time period. It may be that initial high rates of adherence represent the change in behavior due to being observed by a research team. The time period of the implementation study may not have been long enough to see these effects stabilize as documented in previous studies (Leonard and Masatu 2006). The time period of data collection is something to consider for the larger trial.

Relatedly, in the discussion section the paper asserts that when incentives are removed behavior declines. This conclusion does not seem warranted given the strong overall downward trend over time. Without a proper control group this conclusion is not warranted.

The finding that the therapists responded meaningful to the feedback is something to carefully consider for the design of future trials. The fact that the trial combined feedback and incentives makes it difficult to know if incentives would be seen as valuable without the feedback. The feedback would seem to be a treatment worth evaluating on its own in future research. It would be useful to discuss how this design choice affects results more thoroughly.

The incentives provided in this study are quite large and the implementation of the incentives would appear to be quite costly since it requires recording sessions and hiring trained staff to analyze them. Given these significant costs it would be important to consider the need to document program costs and incorporate cost effectiveness analysis in future trials.
I also have a few additional comments:

* It would be useful to clarify whether clinicians received the feedback reports in the post period since this affects the interpretation of results.

* It would be useful to provide more thorough discussion of previous literature on poor adherence to EBT. In particularly it would be useful to compare the rates of adherence observed in this study to prior evidence.

* It would be useful to compare the form of social recognition in this study to other behavioral economics studies.

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