Reviewer’s report

Title: Efficacy of heel lifts versus calf muscle eccentric exercise for mid-portion Achilles tendinopathy (the HEALTHY trial): study protocol for a randomised trial

Version: 0 Date: 10 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Michael Ross Backhouse

Reviewer's report:

I welcome the chance to review this protocol and thank the authors for submitting it to the journal. The protocol represents a thorough evaluation of two commonly used therapies in a clinical area of direct relevance to the readership.

I note that the trial is funded through competitive funding streams so would have undergone peer review during this process. It also underwent review as part of the ethical approval process and is registered on an appropriate trials registry. The trial opened to recruitment in Aug 2017 and is due to complete in Sept 2019. As such I have focussed my comments to the reporting of the protocol rather than the design of the trial as these would be superfluous.

The protocol is well reported and I believe provides enough information to replicate the trial. It is published in accordance with the SPIRIT guidance and the checklist is available as supplementary material.

I have the following minor comments for the authors consideration:

Page 9 line 207 - the abbreviation (UTC) appears to be used incorrectly

Page 11 to 12 - I assume that participants will be randomised in a 1:1 ratio but do not think I saw this confirmed in the manuscript. Unless I have missed it, could the authors please add this information to the manuscript.

Page 12 line 277 - it is recommended not to report block sizes while the study is still in progress in order to reduce the predictability of the sequence (See SPIRIT Guidance)

Page 20 line 487 - whilst I appreciate that the protocol would have been written prior to the publication of the DELTA2 guidance on reporting sample size calculations (2018). I would ask the authors to review this section in light of the recent guidance.

I note that the SPIRIT guidance asks authors to provide details of a DMEC or an explanation of why a DMEC was not required. I assume that this function was performed by the PhD supervisory team and will leave it to the authors whether they wish to include a statement to this effect.
Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.
I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal