Reviewer’s report

Title: Bacteremia Antibiotic Length Actually Needed for Clinical Effectiveness (BALANCE): Study Protocol of a Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial

Version: 2 Date: 13 March 2015

Reviewer: Andrew Judge

Reviewer’s report:

1. Will the study design adequately test the hypothesis?
   Yes

2. Is the planned statistical analysis appropriate?
   Yes

3. Are sufficient details provided to allow replication of the work or comparison with related analyses: if not, what is missing?

   - How does a critically ill patient in ICU provide informed consent? This part could be made clearer.
   - Once a patient has reported positive for bacterium, are they immediately started on antibiotics? What is the timing of starting treatment, consent and randomisation expected to be, and will this information be collected for feasibility? How long are patients or SDM given to give consent?
   - Part of the difficulty in conducting trials is that follow up should always be from the point of randomisation, not from the date treatment was started. While it may not make always make sense clinically, information on outcomes should be collected at the time following randomisation for both arms of the trial. For the secondary outcomes are they collected, for example 90-day mortality, from the point of randomisation? More relevant to the main arm than the feasibility / pilot trial
   - There are clear distinctions between pilot and feasibility studies but the word is used interchangeably throughout the protocol. Is this a pilot study, or a feasibility study?
   - Provide details for statistical analysis of secondary outcomes

4. Is the writing acceptable?

   - TITLE PAGE The authors information is at the end of the manuscript and not in the title page. E-mail addresses for all authors has also not been given.
   - ABSTRACT Headings do not confirm to journal style. Should be background not introduction
   - BACKGROUND State the aims of the research at the end of this section