Reviewer's report

Title: Baseline characteristics and Statistical Analysis Plan for the 'Prevention Of Decline in Cognition After Stroke Trial' (PODCAST) trial

Version: 2 Date: 2 July 2015

Reviewer: Thompson G Robinson

Reviewer's report:

Cognitive impairment is a common complication of stroke, and the authors describe the start-up phase of an important trial (PODCAST) to investigate the feasibility of intensive versus guideline-lowering of blood pressure in all and LDL-cholesterol in ischaemic stroke subtypes. The protocol amendments undertaken in the trial were appropriate reflecting the need to maintain difference between the intensive and guideline arms, and to reflect changes in national guidelines.

I have the following comments:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The background section should be revised to ensure clarity that lowering BP and lipids, antithrombotic therapy reduce ischaemic stroke recurrence following ischaemic stroke. Accordingly, the trial assessed BP and lipid lowering in ischaemic stroke, and BP lowering in ICH. This clarity is provided in the abstract, but not the background.

2. The reviewer is not persuaded that the information presented in the manuscript from the start-up phase meant that the main phase was impractical using the agreed protocol, as implied in the conclusion to the abstract and the manuscript. Whilst the recruitment rate was indeed low, it would seem that approximately 50% of those screened were recruited. Outcome data are not provided to make an informed decision about other protocol aspects, e.g. target BP and lipids, cognitive assessment by phone or in person, etc. Clearly, the excess treatment costs are an important aspects but changes in their provision and the availability of generic atorvastation, may mean that this aspect is less problematic now. Therefore, it would be helpful to have clarity around the exact reasons to support this statement.

3. Whilst the manuscript refers to secondary and primary care sites, this reviewer's interpretation of the site list is that these were all secondary care sites. It would be useful to have the author's comments on whether this was partly the reason for failure to meet the recruitment targets, as this might be potentially addressable in a future trial.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Section May 2012, Bullet point 8, Line 4: 'Infarcts' misspelt
Discretionary Revisions
None.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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