Reviewer's report

Title: Protocol for a pragmatic randomised controlled trial to evaluate effects of a brief intervention for emergency department attendees who present with moderate and high levels of non-specific psychological distress

Version: 4 Date: 25 July 2014

Reviewer: Tracy Stecker

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript is not ready for review as details in the methods section were all pulled from a grant proposal. All sentences are written in future tense, and it's impossible for the reader to know whether the study happened as they had initially planned. As such, I stopped reviewing the manuscript and recommend to authors that they detail methods as they actually happened rather than what was planned. Prior to stopping my review, I had a couple of comments for the authors. First, authors should specify instrument measures used earlier in the manuscript (instead of K10, spell it out and describe the first time it is presented in the manuscript). Second, in the introduction, authors are quite vague with statements such as "participants may have had an actual mental health disorder" (such as.....), "the pilot study revealed that the numbers affected are large and significant proportions are young adults" (I have no idea what this statement means. A large number of what, how large, what is a significant proportion...), "consumer related issues may require efforts to encourage health seeking behavior" (what is a consumer related issue?), "not sufficiently unwell" (I have no idea what that means).

Further, the goal of the study was to assess whether those in distress during an ED visit had reduced distress from MI. Wouldn't folks in the ED have naturally higher distress scores during a visit than a month after the visit is over? Why did authors only look at those in moderate distress during an ED visit? Why not individuals who screen positive for mental health conditions but aren't currently in treatment? Given these issues, it might be hard to identify how this work moves the literature on access to care forward.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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.