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: 17 November 2014

Reviewer: Georges Brousse

Reviewer's report:

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

This is an interesting submission of a research protocol (over a twelve month period) about the effectiveness of Brief Intervention with ED attendees with psychological distress.

This article could be accepted for publication after revisions

Introduction:
Consider adding references to scientific articles to support your arguments.
Is it possible to insert the link to the full text version of the cf. [1] than only abstract version?

Background:
Fifth paragraph: The percentage of admission for mental health disorder in Australian EDs may be interesting for your argument in this section.
Likewise, you can put in your text the percentage of mental health presentations to EDS, not only the evolution: Indeed you write: Statistics from Victoria show that mental health presentations to its EDs have increased by 47%.
Seventh paragraph: consider adding the reference of you pilot study.

Current evidence; motivational interviewing:
Consider adding in this section the state of art concerning the efficiency of MI on yours dependant variables (i.e. reducing levels of depression, anxiety and stress; levels of motivation to self manage health needs; appropriate healthcare-seeking behaviors; improving quality of life).

Intervention:
Second paragraph: What is the rational to use this occurrence (i.e. one, three, six and twelve months) for your follow-up telephone interview?

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use...
of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

References:
#5: there are twice the date in this reference;
#13: idem
#39: idem

Table 1:
Group I/condition 1: consider changing “Mild/moderate psychological distress” by “Moderate and high psychological distress” like in the text.

Table 2: May you clearly indicated the signification of the “X”?

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Hypothesis
First paragraph:
I understand that your design study tests MI intervention follow-up versus no intervention. So is it testing the MI as method of intervention or just intervention vs no intervention? In this case it seems logic that MI follow-up will be more efficient on you dependant variables than nothing.

I think a telephonic follow-up as placebo would bring a stronger design study.

The authors should better explain why participants with a very high distress score (30-50) will be excluded