Author’s response to reviews

Title: Epicardial delivery of autologous atrial appendage micrografts during coronary artery bypass surgery - safety and feasibility study

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3. Revision comments:
1. It would be clearer to start the methods section with the patient selection section from p.10 line 15 to p.11 line 15. Please move this section first.

Author reply: The order of sections has now been changed. We thank the Reviewer for making the text clearer and more logical for the reader.

2. The statistical analysis section is missing. Please add a sample size rationale (a calculation is not required just some rationale) and statistical methods section before the discussion. It is not sufficient to quote ref 32 for this in the checklist. This should address descriptive statistical methods eg use of mean(sd), median (IQR), count and percentage summaries and 95% confidence intervals for each group separately and any plots. Hypothesis tests are not recommended for pilot studies. If any are to be performed then a cautionary caveat is needed that this is an underpowered study and results should be treated with caution as preliminary. The analysis methods should address the feasibility objectives (eg. rates) as well as clinical outcomes given in the table.

Author reply: We have now added the Statistical analysis-section to the manuscript (and Spirit checklist) as suggested by the Reviewer.

“Statistical methodology as published previously by Pätilä et al (2014) will be utilised. Briefly, the Mann–Whitney U-test will be used for non-parametric continuous variables, and results are reported as median with interquartile range (IQR). Categorical variables are analysed with Fisher’s exact test. Intra-observer variability will be assessed using the Bland–Altman method. All p-value testings are 2-sided with p<0.05 considered statistically significant. Computation will be achieved with PASW Statistics, version 18 (IBM, Inc., Armonk, NY) or equivalent software.” (p 13, line 7-13)

3. Please ensure the figures are referred to in the text. Please add units of measurement in Table 2 where missing (eg under efficacy - this is really 'preliminary efficacy' and should be reworded as such).

Author reply: All the figures are now referred to in the text (p 10; line 14, p11; line 10, p 11; line 11-12, p11; line 13 and p 13; line 4-5). We have added the measurement units to Table 2 as well as reworded the “preliminary efficacy” as suggested by the Reviewer.

4. Do any safety considerations need to be added in case something goes wrong to reassure the reader?

Author reply: We have added a short text on this important issue to the manuscript.

“The patients are monitored and their cardiac function is closely evaluated under the hospitalization period. In case of any abnormalities the head researcher will be immediately informed, and the study will be halted for evaluation of the cause.”
Continuation of the study will then be further assessed by the head researcher and the clinical panel responsible for the patient care.” (p 13, line 15-19)