Reviewer’s report

Title: Research protocol: Investigating the feasibility of a group self-management intervention for stroke (The GUSTO study).

Version: 0  Date: 23 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Jemma Hawkins

Reviewer's report:

This is a comprehensive overview of the feasibility testing of a novel approach to intervention for stroke self-management prior to conducting full-scale effectiveness testing.

I have some suggested minor revisions that I believe would improve the quality of the manuscript as follows:

Title:

- As two of the research questions aim to explore the acceptability of the intervention to patients and their family/carers/friends, I wonder if the title should specify the investigation of 'feasibility and acceptability' of the intervention

Abstract:

- If adding acceptability to the title, also specify investigation of this in the methods section of the abstract

- The methods section states that mixed methods will be used to make comparisons between the intervention and wait list groups, this could be more explicit. It seems that comparison will only be made on quantitative measures (qualitative measures are not being conducted with the wait list group whilst they are on the wait list). This part of the abstract could be written in a way that makes it clearer which measures are being used for which purposes.

Introduction:

- The final sentence of the introduction should state that the study is addressing whether it is feasible and acceptable to deliver the intervention
- The sub questions could be ordered in a more logical way and ideally would be split into two sections regarding i) exploration of the feasibility/acceptability of delivering the intervention and ii) exploration of the feasibility/acceptability of methods for a full-scale trial.

Method:
- The number of family/friends/carer participants to be recruited to the focus groups should be specified in the recruitment section (page 9, lines 39-49).
- Could the authors please clarify whether baseline measures will be collected prior to participants being randomised.
- The number of interviews to be conducted with intervention participants is not specified.
- Could the authors please clarify whether any questions regarding acceptability of the intervention will be included in patient questionnaires to complement the qualitative sub-sample.
- On page 14, line 44 the authors refer to 'social aspects', this is vague and would benefit from some further explanation.
- The number of focus groups to be conducted is unclear, could the authors please clarify the anticipated number to be conducted and justifications for this.

Analysis
- The process described for analysing the qualitative data under 'Questions 5 and 6' seems somewhat confused and illogical in order, can the authors please double check this and revise as appropriate. For example, the process for creating and then grouping codes into themes is mentioned at the end of the paragraph, after previously already mentioning that 'the data set will be re-read to find illustrative examples of themes and adjusting them'.
- The use of demographic variables as covariates in the quantitative analysis is referred to on page 17 but the collection of this information is not mentioned in the measures section.

Dissemination
- To what audiences will the various dissemination plans be presented?
In what circumstances will the team progress to a full-scale RCT? It would be useful to document whether there are any a priori criteria that will inform this decision (e.g. a specific minimally acceptable % of participants retained at follow-up, a specific level of adherence/attendance, etc).

Declarations

- Should the authors refer to having received 'favourable ethical opinion' as opposed to 'ethical approval'? I believe this is the correct terminology for NHS Research Ethics Committees.

The quality of written English varies throughout and there are many typos that need correcting, as follows:

The font size varies throughout the manuscript and needs addressing to be consistent

Page 2, Line 34/35 - the first use of the word 'stroke' needs changing to 'a'

Page 3, Line 25 - 'individual' should be plural

Page 3, Line 38 - 'this' should be 'thus'

Page 3, Line 41 - the acronym 'SM' is used to refer to 'Self-Management' throughout the manuscript, it so this should be provided in parentheses when the term is first introduced here

Page 3, Line 48 - this is the first time Self-Management Interventions are introduced, later in the manuscript the acronym 'SMI' is used so it should be provided in parentheses here

Page 5, Line 18 - insert the word 'the' before 'National Institute for Health Research'

Page 6, Line 6 - define the acronym MRC here, this is the first time it is used

Page 8, Line 18 - not sure what 'giving up a larger range of time post stroke' is meant to mean

Page 8, Line 37 - 'continued' should be 'continue' if keeping with the same tense throughout

Page 10, Line 7 - 'or' should be 'for'

Page 11, Line 36 - 'suggesting' should be 'suggest'

Page 11, Line 38 - 'five-eight' is used whereas earlier in the paragraph 'ten to fifteen' and 'five to ten' is used
Page 15, Lines 16-27 - inconsistency with tense used here, the authors say the topic guide 'will be' divided up into three parts and later that the questions 'were developed' with a stakeholder group

Page 15, Line 37 - 'that state' should be 'state that'

Page 15, Lines 46-59 - The titles of the scales used in the patient questionnaire are all given acronyms in parentheses, thus the titles should be capitalised to correspond to these acronyms (e.g. the 'Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)').

Page 16, Line 2 - 'hey' should be 'they' and 'questions' should be 'questionnaire'

Page 16, Line 49 - the word 'take' is missing in 'were approached to part'

Page 16, Lines 52-54 - The sentence that begins 'Willingness …' does not make sense

Page 18, Line 20 - 'detailed' should be 'details'

Page 18, Line 32 - 'the Medical Research Guidelines' should be 'the UK Medical Research Council guidelines'

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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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