Reviewer’s report

Title: The feasibility and acceptability of an early intervention in primary care to prevent Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) in adults: randomised controlled trial

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Reviewer: Gregory Parkin-Smith

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Review
Manuscript Number: PAFS-D-19-00108
Full Title: The feasibility and acceptability of an early intervention in primary care to prevent Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) in adults: randomised controlled trial

Abstract
Well written abstract with the appropriate components. Refreshing to note a transparent description of the outcomes and that many elements of the project were not feasible, thus resulting in a set of solid recommendations for the design of a future study. This is what a pilot or feasibility study is all about, so well done to the researchers for their transparency and honesty around outcomes. Although it is correct to explore recruitment and retention in a pilot study, this could be extended to cover the topics of randomisation, acceptability of treatment, research design and sample size calculations, although some of these outcomes are not that relevant in this particular study.

Introduction
Good introduction and description of CFS related to glandular fever. A paragraph on additional factors or speculated causes of CFS could be added here to demonstrate the breadth of the problem. Furthermore, the Introduction should include 2-3 paragraphs involving a critique of past research where design and confounding factors in the research are identified and discussed. This would support the need for a pilot or feasibility study to specifically investigate the design and implementation issues when investigating interventions for CFS. There is not doubt that this study is needed since early intervention for a chronic problem like CFS is emerging as important in management.

The aim of this pilot feasibility study is clearly stated, but what are the objectives of the study that will address the aim or purpose of the study i.e. what will be done in the study to achieve the aim?

Methods
A sound rationale and argument are provided for the selection, population, and sample size for this pilot study, being reasonable and appropriate.
Patient recruitment was appropriate, with a good approach to selection and recruitment, which included information sharing and voluntary participation/consent. GP recruitment was appropriate and a valuable contribution to the design and planning for the study. This approach described shows information sharing, planning and preparation of the GP practices, which is appropriate. Randomisation is relevant and appropriate. Reasonable description of the interventions, although a bit more detail would be good regarding the usual interventions i.e. what medication is often prescribed, what are the common specialist services. The NICE guidelines are important, but do all GPs adhere to this? Satisfactory description of the experimental intervention, the early intervention. Qualitative analysis was appropriate and very done, demonstrating a good way of examining and evaluating patient and GP responses. Data management was good and considered anonymity and confidentiality.

Results
Good description of the patients, patient flow and CONSORT. Baseline and results data are appropriately described and presented. Good commentary on qualitative information/data with an effort to maintain equipoise. Good description and account of patient and GP interview, obtaining useful insights related to the research process and data collection. Good recommendations are offered to counter problems or unacceptable processes. Excellent that this study identified that recruitment of eligible patients was difficult, which would of course, have a major negative impact in a future definitive study. A paragraph on the funds and resources needed to recruit and treat patients in this pilot study would be useful, so to guide the costs/funding needs for future trials.

Discussion
Good insights as to the problems encountered with the study and aspects that made the study design unacceptable to patients and GPs. A realistic outcome and transparent reporting on a very real problem within practice - recruitment and compliance.

A brief set or list of recommendation that may improve a future study and the research design would be good, to complete the paper.

Conclusion
Appropriate and good.

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An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English
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Acceptable

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