**Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Intensive management for moderate rheumatoid arthritis: a qualitative study of patients' and practitioners' views

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 21 Aug 2018

**Reviewer:** Gwenda Simons

**Reviewer's report:**

This is a very interesting qualitative study, providing some important insights in the acceptability of intensive management of moderate RA as conducted in the TITRATE trial. I certainly see merit in publishing this data, especially in conjunction with a paper on the trial outcomes once available.

I do have some concerns about the current write-up as outlined below:

**Introduction:**

Page 4, line 20-22>> This statement comes a bit 'out of the blue' Perhaps say something about the fact that treatment choices for RA often depend on the disease activity (as measure by the DAS28) than list what is available for what activity level?

Although the trial is described elsewhere in detail, a bit more detail is needed here for the benefit of clarity in the present article, for example Page 4, line 50-51>> perhaps clarify that these were mainly nurses specifically trained for the trial? ; Page 4, Line 54>> Is the medication always increased as suggested here or is it adjusted by the rheumatologist as and when necessary, with the option to introduce biologics? What is the aim of the patient hand book?

Page 5, line 1-14>>This section is a little bit difficult to follow and seemingly includes a contradiction.

Overall it feels that the introduction is somewhat 'disjointed', with loose statements about particular studies. A restructure of the introduction should perhaps be considered which leads to a clearer statement as to what the research at hand was designed to do and why.

**Method:**

A bit more information is needed here, for example: What was the proportion of patients that signed up for an interview (how many were approached during their first appointment in the time frame stated and how many agreed to do the interview)? I understand that you cannot provide the age and gender of each individual nurse participating in the interviews as this might compromise
their anonymity, however it would be good to state the proportion of male/ female and the mean age of this group.

How was the number of necessary interviews determined? Was this due to number of patients/ practitioners volunteering for an interview or did you stop recruiting once there were no further emerging themes?

The group interview of 3 practitioners is more like a focus group and should perhaps be described as such.

Results

Page 15, line 36-39>>Can you supply a quote for the participant who felt that there was no impact on the self-management of their RA?

Discussion

I think it is telling how the nurses compare the trial to the normal 'standard' care and how in standard care they do not do more than recording disease activity. It would be good to go into the possibilities of integrating these monthly longer appointments in standard care. Extra training is one thing, but if the possibility is not there for this to be integrated into standard care only a small proportion of patients is going to benefit.

You describe a number of other interventions, but you do not really compare their results with the result from the current study and trial.

Research nurses also have different motivation than specialist nurses (trials are part of their job). Did the sample for the interviews differ in any way from the larger group of practitioners who delivered the treatment sessions throughout the trial?

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Acceptable

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