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Community treatment orders for patients with psychosis

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Psychiatric care is often organized upon a legal framework which is not validated from a scientific perspective. To overcome this state of the art, Burns et al. tested whether Community Treatment Orders (CTOs) reduce admissions compared with use of Section 17 leave and found no support in terms of any reduction in overall hospital admission (1). However, despite there was no significant evidence of superiority, it does not mean that the two interventions are equivalent. For ethical, practical, and legal reasons, 21 % of the patients in the CTOs group and 24 % of the patients in the Section 17 leave group were switched to the other intervention. When such protocol violations are the rule rather than the exception, intention to treat analysis (ITT) is too much conservative to say that no difference exists between the two interventions because the two groups become very similar. For this reason, authors have performed a per-protocol analysis (PP) which gave similar results that the ITT (they did not present results of this analysis). Nevertheless, such analysis suffers from a dramatic loss of power with a type II error (β) of 33 % under the hypotheses stated in the paper.

The obvious next step does not need new data acquisition. It consists of performing an equivalence meta-analysis based on the three available randomised controlled trials (1-3). Since such analysis need to focus upon both analyses sets (ITT and PP), it is then necessary that authors make available the results of their per-protocol analysis.

Competing interests

There are no conflicts of interest regarding this letter.

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