Reviewer's report

Title: Physical activity counselling in primary care: General Practitioners' views and experiences

Version: 1 Date: 30 August 2011

Reviewer: Patti-Jean Naylor

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written manuscript that is of interest to researchers and public health decision-makers who are interested in changing physical activity promotion in practice.

The most significant contribution is an understanding of when and how a GP will prescribe exercise and use tools like the Green Prescription and the supports that lend themselves to implementation. Having said that, there are some definite issues like 'response bias' that need to be highlighted in the manuscript to increase the transparency and allow the reader to make a more informed assessment of the evidence.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Overall the most significant revision that is necessary is to more fully describe the participants in the methods in terms of their own physical activity levels and motivation levels. In addition, how many had used and were currently using the Green Prescription - or would describe themselves as a regular user, sometimes user, used before but not now user. This is important for illuminating what the potential bias in response is. Small, purposive samples are credible in qualitative research but it is important to note the potential for bias as a limitation. It is very likely that you have good information about why and how a 'willing' physician will use the green prescription. You should emphasize this in the discussion that 'even with willing physicians' there are many systemic barriers to implementation.

2. The above issue relates to the sentence on p. 18 that says "a full spectrum of views was expressed. Please support this with some 'prevalence' information. Were any of the responses/themes common across every interview. Did you have some negative cases - where a physician participated but wasn't prescribing physical activity and/or using the Green Prescription. Were there any patterns in the data related to the type of respondent?"

3. The questions were very targeted and as a result are also somewhat leading. For instance, "why do you give out physical activity advice" assumes they do. The implication of this very targeted approach on the data analysis and findings should be elucidated in the findings.

4. I think the title should have Green Prescription added to it because of the very focused direction of the questions or at least 'prescription pad approach to PA
counselling’. This wasn't a generic study of PA counselling but a focused exploration of the reasons, scope of use and facilitators and barriers to use of a specific practice strategy.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.