Reviewer’s report

Title: Exercise therapy for Stress-related Mental Disorder, a randomised controlled trial in primary care.

Version: 1 Date: 14 February 2011

Reviewer: Tim Holt

Reviewer's report:

This study, as the authors openly discuss, was limited due to high withdrawal rates and other practical issues. Its findings are important because they demonstrate the difficulties of trialling a physical activity intervention, which requires active engagement of individual participants, and it is also important that negative outcomes are published. I recommend acceptance.

Minor revisions

In the Abstract Results section, 'No effects of the intervention were measured for any secondary outcome parameter either' should I think be 'No significant effects of the intervention were detected for any secondary outcome parameter either'

In describing 'usual care', the authors state that 'To reach these goals, the General Practitioner (GP) generally offers supportive consultations in line with the professional recommendations of the Dutch College for General Practice.' Can we generalise about what GPs actually do for such patients? If so, the Dutch College's guidance should be cited at this point.

Thirdly, the authors state that 'For the GP, initiation and monitoring of physical activity in patients with SMD is relatively easy, as he has good insight in the patients' general health, his social environment and the local sports facilities.' I would question whether it is in fact easy for GPs to initiate physical activity in anyone, particularly those with mental health problems. Getting the general public to exercise more is in fact currently the topic of two funded trials in the UK, which aim to identify ways of making this happen consistently in the primary care environment.

Finally, in the Methods section, I was interested to know how the participants were identified. 'Selections were made through the GP electronic files'. Was this through the use of a coded problem title? If so, could this selection have been biased and could potential participants have been missed?

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
**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'