Reviewer's report

Title: A snapshot of the prevalence of physical activity amongst older, community dwelling Victorians: patterns across the young-old and old-old

Version: 1 Date: 16 November 2006

Reviewer: Gregory Kolt

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper addresses an important aspect of health promotion, that being physical activity participation. The target group has been older adults, with a specific focus on the old-old age group. This age group is often ignored in research of this nature, so the current manuscript is welcomed. In general the paper is well written, however, some points require clarification (detailed below).

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Throughout the manuscript there is mixed use of the terms exercise and physical activity. These should be seen as different terms with exercise being a subset of physical activity. I believe that the authors mean to use the term physical activity in nearly all instances, so should change many of the references to "exercise" throughout the text.

2. Abstract (Results) lines 2-3. The sentence beginning "Prevalence of physical activity . . ." is difficult to follow and requires rewording.

3. In the methods you need to indicate the total number of GPs approached (from the 85 practices) so that the reader can interpret the GP response rate (i.e., 40 GPs agreed out of . . . approached).

4. Method, paragraph 1 - How did the GPs ascertain those of their patients "less likely to to be currently engaged in physical activity". I imagine this would be very hard to do from what I assume was a review of patient files.

5. Method, paragraph 1 - Were the GPs trying to identify those patients likely to have depressive symptoms for the trial, given that that was the focus for the trial? Does this influence the physical activity data from those people?

6. Method, paragraph 1 - Were the eligibility criteria noted those for the full trial or those for the PA assessment? Please make this clearer.

7. Method, paragraph 1 - Please include the method by which GPs recruited older patients. Was it through screening patient files?

8. Results, paragraph 1 - If 346 screening instruments were returned from 984 people recruited, the response rate is 35% not 33% as noted.

9. Results, paragraph 1 - Make it clear whether or not the whole sample completed the PA assessment or only those below the depressive symptoms cut-off of 11.

10. Results, Attitudes Towards Physical Activity - In this paragraph there appears to be confusion between perceptions of PA, awareness of PA messages, and agreement with messages. These are three different concepts that the authors appear to be confusing, hence this section and the Discussion on it further into the paper requires revision for clarity.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author...
can be trusted to correct)

1. p. 13, paragraph 2, line 1 - Change "giving" to "given".

2. Table 1 - Insert (N=330) in the Table heading. Also in this Table some of the figures in the "Australian population" column require references to sources.

3. Table 4 - As pointed out above, the heading of the Table confuses the issues of awareness and agreement with PA messages.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. p 14, paragraph 3 - The authors may also want to refer to Kolt et al (2006). Med Sci Sports Ex, 5(Suppl.), S120 for an example of a study showing longer-term changes in PA in previously sedentary older adults.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have not competing interests