Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluation of physical activity programmes for elderly people - a descriptive study using the EFQM'criteria

Version: 2 Date: 30 December 2010

Reviewer: Joseph Ciccolo

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The purpose of this manuscript is to characterize the quality of the physical activity programs developed by the Portuguese Local Administration using the criteria of the EFQM Excellence Model. The manuscript is very well written, the importance of the question posed by the authors is clear, and the methodological analyses used to evaluate the chosen programs are appropriate. However, the significance of the findings is unclear as the description of the programs included in the analysis is not reported. Although the authors state that a questionnaire assessed the age of the PA program, the characteristics of the participants engaged in the program, the number of activities included in the PA program, and the frequency of the program, none of these characteristics are revealed within the manuscript. As a result, it is unclear what types of programs are being evaluated and whether or not the EFQM Excellence Model is an appropriate tool. A full description of the programs using the characteristics previously mentioned is needed.

2. The manner in which the authors identified and chose programs to evaluate lacks a scientific explanation. They state that a total of 97 out of 278 online questionnaires were answered, and from that 97, 125 physical activity programs were identified. It can only be assumed that some questionnaires were answered with respect to more than one program or that some programs were embedded within others. If so, why was each individual program not outlined by an independent questionnaire detailing its specific operations? Furthermore, the authors narrowed the number of eligible programs using certain criteria: programs needed to be from a District Capital, have been in practice for 10 or more years, had two or more types of activities, a frequency of two or more times a week, and a quality initiative. What is the rational and scientific basis for using these specific inclusion/exclusion criteria?

3. The significance of the findings would be substantially enhanced by providing data that connects quality to outcome. For example, the data presented does not associate high or low quality programs with a high or low level of participation in physical activity. Can the public health community just assume that a high quality program is sufficient and will produce population increases in physical activity? As stated in the conclusion, successful programming will improve services and increase the access and level of physical activity in elderly citizens. If so,
membership or participation rates should have an association with the level of quality and services delivered. If such data are available, they would dramatically add to the findings.

4. The authors should acknowledge that the external validity of the findings presented is significantly low. Although the analyses used to evaluate the programs are sound, the results are overwhelmingly idiosyncratic given the specific methods used to collect the sample.

Minor Essential Revisions: None

Discretionary Revisions
1. In the abstract PA is used without stating that PA is physical activity
2. Background, paragraph 3: consider changing ‘means’ to ‘is defined as’
3. Throughout the entire manuscript, numbers less than 10 are list as numerals instead of words (e.g., 3 instead of three).
4. Results, paragraph 1: consider a change to starting a sentence with a number (i.e., 38.46% of..)
5. Discussion, paragraph 5: consider omitting ‘besides’

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.