Reviewer's report

Title: Who stays, who drops out? Biosocial predictors of adherence in participants attending a longer term exercise referral scheme in the UK

Version: 2 Date: 22 November 2011

Reviewer: Afroditi Stathi

Reviewer's report:

I would like to thank the authors for addressing most of the points raised in the initial review. The paper has improved a lot.

However, I would like to maintain my view that this study should refer only to adherence to the ERS programme and not to maintenance of behaviour change. The authors have described well that this ERS programme has a longer duration than most ERS. The fact that people may have attended sessions for 20-26 weeks does not automatically mean that they have moved to the maintenance stage of behaviour change. This is still the action stage of a specific programme targeting a specific behaviour (i.e. attendance to structured exercise sessions).

a. The study does not provide any subjective/objective data of levels of physical activity prior, post, and at a later stage after programme completion. That would be absolutely necessary in order to evaluate whether health behaviour changes (physical activity) have been introduced and maintained.

b. The study does not provide follow-up data to evaluate what the ERS participants did after the programme completion. These participants adhered well to a specific programme, with specific characteristics and specific duration. The maintenance of their behaviour (session attendance) would need further assessment at a later stage after the completion of the ERS programme. That will include assessment of whether they continued attending other organized forms of exercise provision.

c. The study does not provide process evaluation measures which could help us understand how different factors contributed to different stages of involvement with the ERS. Therefore, we can not assume based only on duration of the programme that people have moved from action to maintenance stage.

d. The study does not provide information about whether this ERS was theory driven by using appropriate theoretical framework/intervention mapping approach which could inform us of different strategies/techniques used at different stages of the programme (action/maintenance). It is not clear if the transtheoretical model presented in this study has actually informed the development and delivery of the components of the ERS.

Compulsory Revisions

The value of this study is that it provides us with information about ERS with longer duration than the standard 10-12 weeks provision. I would like to suggest
the authors to remove and re-write all sections that refer to maintenance and focus solely on issues related to adherence to the programme.

In particular, the abstract and discussion sections will need to be re-written in order to reflect the focus of the paper, the limitations and how future research on provision and effectiveness of ERS can address these limitations.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.