Reviewer's report

Title: Football Fans in Training: the development and optimization of an intervention delivered through professional sports clubs to help men lose weight, become more active and adopt healthier eating habits

Version: 1 Date: 16 October 2012

Reviewer: Philip Morgan

Reviewer's report:

This article describes the development of the “Football Fans in Training” program, aimed at assisting men to lose weight by promoting healthier dietary habits and physical activity through an innovative engagement and delivery medium. Aligning a men’s weight loss intervention with a professional sports club is a novel approach. These types of programs are important as obesity in men is a serious public health issue, yet men are extremely difficult to engage in weight loss programs. Therefore, there is a need for evidence-based gender-tailored weight loss programs, particularly for men. This study utilised a comprehensive process of intervention development, both the process and findings represent an important addition to the literature. While the article is generally well written, there are a number of concerns that need to be addressed, before it could be considered for publication. The dot points below include strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.

Compulsory revisions

o Could you please elaborate on what a “scoping review” is, both in the Abstract and Methods sections?

o You recruited men aged 35-65 years but what was the rationale for excluding the 18-35 year age group? The younger age group is typically more difficult to engage, but they are an important group particularly given the public health priority of prevention (i.e. to minimise/prevent obesity-related comorbidities from occurring later in life). Also, I would imagine they are likely to be interested/engaged in a football-related program.

o The Introduction provides a strong rationale for conducting the intervention. However, it also needs to present the rationale for describing the development and refinement phase of the intervention, and why this is important.

o You need to state that there have been very few quality male-only RCT’s. Please see the recent systematic review by Young et al. Effectiveness of male-only weight loss and weight loss maintenance interventions: a systematic review with meta-analysis. Obesity Reviews.

o References 8 and 11 are twelve years old – please replace with more recent references.

o Page 4, paragraph 2 second last sentence: add more appropriate references,
e.g. Pagoto 2012, Obesity and Young 2012, Obesity Reviews.

o Page 4, paragraph 2 last sentence: Some of the work by Morgan and colleagues in Australia could be integrated in the introduction. For example, their work on engaging men in weight loss recently published in Obesity Research and Clinical Practice.

o References 19-23: Are these from peer-reviewed journals?

o Did you record other process measures in phase 2, such as attendance, satisfaction and intervention fidelity?

o Page 5 final sentence: Please elaborate on what men’s motivations were to lose weight.

o You state that as part of step 2 of Phase 1 you determined the optimal target population by reviewing the evidence regarding potential health benefits of weight loss – this is already well established in the literature so why was this a focus?

o Phase 2 included important aspects of program development. Who were the coaches included in the process evaluation? Were they club coaches or trained facilitators? What was their sex, qualifications, and how much training did they have? Were the coaches trained to use ‘banter’ (Page 20, paragraph 2).

o Phase 2, paragraph 1: Please add the reference citing the results of your feasibility trial.

o Phase 2, paragraph 2: It’s a shame the results of the anonymous feedback forms can’t be linked to the outcomes. Please acknowledge this.

o Phase 2, paragraph 2: When identifying what aspects of the program participants liked, did you use only open-ended questions? More detail is needed regarding the numerical coding of these open-ended questions.

o Phase 2, paragraph 3: How was the sample of men selected for the focus group discussions? How many men were there? The description of your focus groups is otherwise very well written.

o Phase 2, paragraph 5 (page 7-8): How many program sessions were observed? Who observed these sessions? Did they complete a checklist? Was a framework or template used for recording the detailed notes? Please include your observation proforma as an appendix or a table.

o Paragraph 1, line 7: Please elaborate on the evidence for increasing physical activity in inactive people (provide examples).

o Page 9, line 4: What exactly were participants self-monitoring? Please elaborate.

o Page 10, line 1-2: With a response rate of 51.2%, there is potential bias as you’re unable to accurately determine weight loss as a result of the intervention. How much do you know about the success/lack of success of those that were involved in phase 2?

o Page 11, line 7: What did the physical activity sessions entail?

o Page 16: Exit reasons – Please report the overall percentage of men who did
not complete the program.

o Page 17: Please explain/elaborate how raising the BMI inclusion criteria fostered camaraderie.

o Page 17: I would think the label reading session would be better suited to taking place even earlier in the program. Why did you feel week 8 was good timing for this session?

o Page 18: Were the six email prompts standardised or individualised?

o Figure 1 is confusing.

**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