Reviewer’s report

Title: Process and effect evaluation of a two-year complex intervention to reduce loneliness in non-institutionalised elderly Dutch people

Version: 3 Date: 9 May 2013

Reviewer: Peter Craig

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Minor essential revisions
1. Figure 2 present response rate figures based on the achieved baseline sample, rather than the initial invited sample. Since it is possible that response to the invitation could be associated with the outcome of interest, it would be preferable to use the initial issued sample as the baseline. The final response rate is therefore closer to one-third rather than one-half as shown in the figure.

Discretionary revisions
2. While the health and wellbeing of elderly people is an important public health issue in countries with an ageing population, no reference is provided for the claim (page 3) that ‘prevention of loneliness’ is called for by public health policy. All the references in the introduction are to scientific publications rather than to policy documents.

3. The primary outcome measure is ambiguous. Rather than stating clearly whether loneliness literacy, social support or loneliness is the primary outcome, the paper refers to an initial, intermediate and ultimate outcome, and treats them as though they are of equal status. Usual practice would be to treat the ultimate outcome, loneliness, as primary, since that is the policy goal, and to use the others to explain variation in this outcome, rather than as outcomes in their own right.

4. The lengthy discussion of the loneliness literacy scale (pages 10-12) is out of place in a paper whose focus is on the public health question of how to prevent loneliness among elderly people, and would be better suited to an accompanying methodological paper in an ageing studies journal. The discussion in the present paper should focus on whether and how preventing loneliness should be pursued as a goal of public health policy.

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.