Reviewer's report

Title: Individual, facility, and program factors affecting retention in a national weight management program

Version: 2

Date: 17 December 2013

Reviewer: Olga Khavjou

Reviewer's report:

I think that this is a very well-written, well-organized, and interesting paper. I enjoyed reading it. I recommend a few minor revisions, which are listed below.

Major Compulsory Revisions - none

Minor Essential Revisions:

1. Results: I would mention that 46% of the participants dropped out after attending just 1 session. I think that's an interesting fact to note.
2. Results: what was the maximum number of visits that a participant attended?
3. Results: I think it's important to note that the first four paragraphs under the Results section describe unadjusted results. Because they are unadjusted for covariates, they may be less interesting so if the authors are running short on word limit, this section could be cut down.
4. Results: paragraphs 4 and 5 describe differences by facility staffing and program strategies but in table 2 programs strategies are listed before staffing. I recommend changing the order either in the text or in the table to be consistent.
5. Results: replace "gender" with "sex".
6. Discussion: The attrition rates reported in previous studies (specifically, Tsai and Wadden), were they from randomized controlled trial or real-world setting programs (like the one described in this study)? If there were from RCTs, that could explain why in the current study attrition was higher because it is easier to achieve higher compliance in a controlled setting vs. real world setting.
7. I think the paper would benefit from a stronger "So What" discussion. What do the results imply? Is the author's recommendation that those who are more likely to remain in the program should be recruited to begin with (because you might be wasting your time with those who are not going to stay anyways) or should weight loss programs try harder on retaining those who are more likely to drop out?
8. Is there data available on how much weight participants have lost? For example, would be interesting to compare weight loss after 3 visits among those who dropped out and those who continued the program. Did those who dropped out did so because they already reached their goal weight so didn't need to participate in the program any longer? Weight loss analysis may warrant a separate manuscript but I think it's worth mentioning here whether such data are available and will be analyzed separately. If weight loss data are not available, I
think it should be mentioned as a limitation. Along the same lines, I think it is important to mention in the paper that the MOVE! program has been shown to be effective at reducing weight (has it?). Otherwise, the retention results are not relevant if they refer to a program that is not effective.

9. Figure 2: I recommend changing the title of the X-axis to "Number of Total Visits".

Discretionary Revisions - none

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests