Reviewer's report

**Title:** Impact of Extra Front Counselling Sessions through Phone Calls On Smoking Cessation Outcomes among Smokers in Penang State, Malaysia

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 30 December 2013

**Reviewer:** Steven Fu

**Reviewer's report:**

**General Comments**
This paper presents the results for a randomized controlled trial evaluating the effects of front-loaded telephone counseling in addition to usual smoking cessation care consisting of in-person smoking cessation counseling (seven sessions) and four follow-up telephone counseling calls over three months. Smoking abstinence outcomes were assessed at 3 and 6 months and biochemically verified. Positive effects were observed for the front-loaded counseling intervention group at 6 months. Study findings add to the knowledge base regarding the effectiveness of tobacco cessation treatments in Chinese and Malay populations. A main limitation of the study is the smaller sample size and the trial did not reach its recruitment goal.

**Major Revisions**
1. Table one should show the baseline characteristics separately for the intervention and control groups in order for the reader to assess if randomization resulted in balanced groups.
2. A study flow diagram must be presented that accounts for and illustrates the follow-up status for each randomized participant.
3. What is the attrition rate for each group? Penalized imputation was used in that participants lost to follow-up were assumed to be continuing smokers, but it is important to know what proportion this represented. If there was differential attrition, there could be attrition bias.
4. Please provide a more detailed description of usual care to help the reader understand what usual care in Malaysia consists of. For example, it was unclear whether the in-person counseling was individual or group counseling?
5. The provision of NRT and/or other smoking cessation medications is unclear and requires clarification. The manuscript reports participants were given two weeks of NRT. But, what about afterwards as counseling was 3 months in duration? Please also describe what is standard of care in Malay with respect to pharmacotherapy.
6. Why were participants who continued to use NRT greater than two weeks excluded from the trial?
7. An explanation is needed for why the study did not reach its recruitment goal. The recruitment period was about 8 months in duration. It seems that if the
investigators would have continued recruitment for a few additional months, they would have reached their target goal.

8. Smoking abstinence rates increased from three to six months. The authors are encouraged to discuss and provide an explanation for this finding. One might have expected smoking abstinence rates to decrease as is often seen in smoking cessation clinical trials.

**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