Reviewer’s report

Title: Utility of telephone survey methods in population-based health studies of older adults: An example from the Alberta Older Adult Health Behavior (ALERT) Study.

Version: 1 Date: 1 April 2014

Reviewer: Shona Kelly

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Minor Essential Revisions

The title is well structured, precise and explains, without ambiguity, what the researchers hope to answer

Abstract is well structured and follows the research process.

1. It states that a total of 1081 subjects (85%) submitted self-measured ambulatory results. This is in-fact 83.4%. All the other percentages are rounded to 1 decimal place, except for this statistic.

2. The authors state that a total of 7013 were deemed eligible for the study, and that 4913 refused to participate, and that 1296 completed the telephone interviews. There is 804 subjects unaccounted for in this breakdown.

3. The authors state the number of times the waist circumference should be measured, which should also be included in the abstract, because the number of times the pedometer has to be used is stated. If space is at a premium then remove the number of measures from both in the abstract.

4. The authors also seem to the term ‘subjects’ but sometimes they use the term ‘patients’.

Background

5. The authors state that details regarding the recruitment procedures and results are often limited and not described at all, as well the methods used to recruit and enrol older adults. However it is not clear how this gap was identified as there is no literature cited by the authors to support this stance, or whether this gap was identified from there literature review. The cited literature is somewhat dated. I seem to remember a few recent papers on CATI in one of the BMC journals/

Methodology

6. The authors mention the use of a newly developed tool designed to assess total past year sitting behaviours using a several domain to measure this. Because this tool is new and unknown to readers, it might be that the authors should have explained the background, and perhaps the strength of adopting this tool.

7. No ethics procedures are described.

Results
8. Though the authors include p values which are measures of significance, these are not discussed in the results section. What is being tested?

9. The tables are clear to follow but some of the data may have been presented as graphs or figures, for example Table 1 would have been more understandable as a flow chart.

Discussion

10. I find it difficult to believe that income, education and race/ethnicity are not available from census data for subregions of Alberta. Given the high proportion with post-secondary education this is unlikely to be a representative sample for this age group.

11. The discussion would benefit from a short paragraph giving advice about the technique. For example,
- CATI is most useful in groups which still have landlines (older people)
- the maximum number of calls before there were diminishing returns
- etc.

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'