Reviewer's report

Title: Do weight management programmes delivered at professional football clubs attract and engage high risk men? A mixed-methods study

Version: 1 Date: 7 October 2013

Reviewer: Andy Pringle

Reviewer's report:

1. In summary, this submission is an original contribution with potential to make an important impact in the design and delivery of men’s health improvement. I recommend that the paper is accepted without revisions. My conclusion is supported by further observations reported in the following sections.

2. This submission is timely, given that there has been a rise in popularity of football-based health improvement schemes and concerns exist over the need for sound evidence on their impact. Decisions on football-based health improvement schemes need to be based on robust evaluation evidence, a point acknowledged in this paper. This submission is based on data collected from the Fit Fans in Training (FFIT) RCT and shows that with appropriate resources ‘gold standard’ research designs can be administered in community contexts. To the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of studies that replicate this approach/design in football-led health improvement settings. As such, this paper makes both an original and important contribution to the field of men’s health improvement and health promotion generally.

3. Given the innovative nature of the context, impact and originality of the study, it is my view that the paper will not only be of interest to those working in the field of men’s health improvement, but also a wider audience. More general media interest in the FFIT programme may lead to a broader audience accessing this paper, should it be accepted for publication.

4. As the authors point out, it is important that research is not only conducted on the effect of innovative health programmes, but also that process investigations are conducted into how such programmes have their effects. With those thoughts in mind, this submission makes an important contribution to the literature in this area. Participants engaging this programme provide important insights into how such interventions can be implemented in a way which is acceptable and accessible to them. This is especially important given that participants are those at risk of ill-health and were typically not engaging weight management programmes prior to attending FFIT. As such they are an ‘unreached group’ and this paper provides important insights into their experiences of FFIT. The findings on intervention delivery have potential to shape future practice in this area of health improvement.

5. A helpful feature of this paper is the supply of data on the characteristics of
men attracted to FFIT to allow comparisons with data from respondents of the Scottish Health Survey.

More generally:

6. The abstract is concise and succinct and the title of the paper is informative.

7. The questions posed by the authors are well defined; the methods adopted are clearly justified and are appropriate to the research context. The selection of a mixed methods approach is highly acceptable given that process evaluations have been called for the literature.

8. The intervention context, the intervention and the procedures for data collection are well described in a format which is accessible to the reader.

9. The paper reports the necessary ethical procedures and arrangements for research ethics clearance. Arrangements for acknowledging the participant’s time are clearly described in the paper.

10. Throughout the paper the authors clearly build upon the research in field, including contributions in weight management, men’s health and football-led health improvement. A broad literature base has been used effectively to justify the case for the research and in the discussion of the findings/results, where a number of important points are developed including, what made the intervention acceptable to the participants.

11. Sound accessibility to the content is a feature of the paper throughout, the manuscript is clear, coherent and logical with sound connectivity between the sections and underpinning literature. As such the writing meets the required standards. The data and the analysis and reporting are sound and the limitations of the work are well balanced and clearly stated by the authors.

12. In short, this is an original contribution with potential to make an important impact in the area of men's health improvement.

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest 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'