Reviewer's report

Title: Applied public health research - falling through the cracks?

Version: 2 Date: 11 June 2009

Reviewer: Charles Foster

Reviewer's report:

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

It would be helpful for the reader to have a sense of the equivocal findings of the systematic review used by the PHIAC to derive their recommendations. These 4 studies were assessed for their quality and summary findings. The original reviews are available from the NICE website.

It would also help to have a brief overview of the actual process used for the construction of these particular recommendations. The findings of a systematic review were assessed by a committee of general public health specialists (none with specific physical activity expertise). The committee discussed their conclusions related to the recommendation, asked additional questions of the reviewers and considered the economic report as well. It is too simplistic to blame NICE for the conclusions of an independent committee and it may be a reflection of that committee’s opinion at that time. Perhaps when this review is updated (due 2009-2010 their recommendation may be overturned.

It would be useful to discuss the design and results of the Issacs et al HTA exercise referral trial in light of the authors’ views that the design of a RCT with a wait list is unethical or unpopular. The difficulties this trial had in recruitment supports this view.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Reference 5 has been updated in 2008 with the same conclusion.

Reference 8 is not related to the NICE recommendation process please amend

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

This is a well written paper with an interesting argument for the differences between the views research, policy and practice on the nature and value of evidence.

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.

I would like to point out I was part of the review team that produced the review for NICE.