Reviewer’s report

Title: Singing classes for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: a randomized control trial

Version: 1 Date: 8 June 2012

Reviewer: Stephen M Clift

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions
1. Fuller justification of design – and in particular the decision not to undertake an ‘intention to treat analysis’
2. Fuller justification of the suitability of the statistical approach adopted. Covariate analysis taking account of baseline assessments should be considered. Comment required on the extent to which the data meet the assumptions for parametric analysis
3. Means, standard deviations and confidence intervals for measures at baseline and follow-up required
4. Ensure accuracy and consistency between description of measures in text and reports in Tables 1 and 2 (there are some inconsistencies and omissions)
5. Data on activity measurement needed at baseline and explanation and checking required of data on activity in Table 2 (the differences between the groups are puzzling and seem very wide)

Minor essential revisions
6. Ensure accuracy of results reported in Tables 1 and 2 and consistency in number of decimal places (1 or 2 in all cases)
7. Abstract highlights FEV1 – consider stating that groups did not differ on the primary outcome measure or on the range of baseline measures employed
8. Fuller description of the two conditions – what did the singing programme and the film programme consist of and was there an element of choice for participants? Did the film group last for two hours each week? Did all participants in the two conditions attend one group together during the study? There appeared to be three singing group facilitators. How they share the work of facilitation? In the qualitative results section one of the participants in the singing group mentions an ‘open mic’ session in a pub. Was this suggested/supported by the facilitator?
9. Why did some participants drop out of the groups they had been assigned to? Was there an option for participants to continue as participants in the trial even though they did not wish to continue with the groups?
10. Did all participants attend all sessions?
11. Clearer discussion of potential confounding factors between the two
conditions – for example the singing group met twice a week over eight weeks, but the film group once a week. This must mean that the singing group was more active simply because they had twice as much travelling to do. Singing group also had more opportunity to socialise and get to know one another and would probably be standing some of the time during the activity whereas the film group would be sitting for most of the time.

12. Inconsistency in references to heart rate vs. heart rate recovery in text and tables. Subjective recovery mentioned in Table 1 but not text.
13. Stated in Discussion that singing group showed ‘worse performance’ on the control of breathing measures, but reference to Table 2 shows only a very slight reduction in breath hold time, and an improvement in singing breath counting.

Discretionary revisions
14. Consistency in reference to the singing intervention? Lessons, classes or workshops?
15. Increase of length of the singing intervention compared with previous study – did two further weeks make a difference in the opinion of the facilitators?
16. References to the issue of social isolation – sources? What about heightened risks of depression as a factor that the singing intervention could address?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests