Reviewer’s report

Title: The Home- Heart Walk study: an intervention to promote physical activity and self-management in people with stable chronic heart failure - a randomised controlled trial

Version: 3 Date: 31 December 2010

Reviewer: John Cleland

Reviewer’s report:

I have no competing interests. This describes the design of an interesting study for a ‘simple’ life-style intervention strategy. The paper is well written with only minor, simple typos. There are some issues around the clarity of design and power for secondary endpoints that should be addressed. The study is otherwise adequately designed to address its primary outcome.

Major Compulsory Revisions
Baseline measurements should be done before randomisation. It is bad methodology to do this afterwards as knowledge of assigned group (by patient or investigator) may affect performance. The abstract says that baseline data are collected after randomisation but the manuscript itself is unclear. This should be clarified and be made consistent. If at all possible at this stage, the protocol should be changed, if required, to ensure baseline measurements are made after consent but before randomisation.

The study is totally underpowered to observe effects on morbidity and mortality. The study will ‘fail’ on these outcomes, which could be used by some to suggest that the intervention is ineffective. This needs to be highlighted.

Minor Essential Revisions
Brief power-calculations on the primary endpoint and number of participants should be given in the abstract. Please state that tables 2/3 that these apply to intervention and control groups.

Discretionary Revisions
The logic of using both SF-36 and Minnesota scales should be explained. Physical function domain can be extracted from each. What is the power to show a difference on the Minnesota Physical domain?