Author’s response to reviews

Title: A Systematic Review of the Use of Financial Incentives and Penalties to Encourage Uptake of Healthy Behaviours: protocol

Authors:

Jean Adams (j.m.adams@ncl.ac.uk)
Emma L Giles (e.l.giles@ncl.ac.uk)
Shannon Robalino (shannon.robalino@ncl.ac.uk)
Elaine McColl (elaine.mccoll@ncl.ac.uk)
Falko F Sniehotta (falko.sniehotta@ncl.ac.uk)

Version: 4 Date: 10 July 2012

Author’s response to reviews: see over
4 July 2012

Dear Dr. Moher

Re. MS: 1660906145733713; A Systematic Review of the Use of Financial Incentives to Encourage Uptake of Healthy Behaviours: protocol; Jean Adams, Emma L Giles, Shannon Robalino, Elaine McColl and Falko F Sniehotta

Many thanks for your email of 2 July 2012 inviting revisions of the above manuscript. We have now had a chance to redraft the manuscript taking into consideration the issues identified by both yourself and the reviewer. A revised version of the manuscript is enclosed for your consideration. We also include a further copy with changes marked using the ‘track changes’ facility in Word. Here we detail our responses to the issues identified.

In response to the editorial comment:

1. Can you please include the PROSPERO number in your abstract.

The PROSPERO registration number has been included in the abstract as requested (p4).

In response to the reviewer’s comments:

1. As the authors are including different type of study designs, explain – describe the analytical methods that will be used (all designs together, RCTs vs. quasi experimental designs) and if results from different study designs will be summarized-combined.

We will describe the range of study designs employed in our descriptive synthesis. We will also conduct separate meta-analysis (e.g. sub-group analyses) according to study design, if appropriate. We have included this in the “Strategy for data synthesis” section (p12).

2. Regarding the word “Financial Incentives” - Though economists probably understand that incentives can be both positive and negative (disincentives), the general readership may not, and this study clearly incorporates both positive and negative incentives. It would be good to find a word, specially in the title, to use in the paper, that clearly confers the notion of both incentives and disincentives/penalties

The phrase “and penalties” has been added to the phrase “financial incentives” in the title and throughout the abstract. In the introductory section defining what we mean by financial incentives we have specifically highlighted that we use the term “financial incentives” throughout the remainder of the manuscript to include both positive and negative incentives (p5). We chose to adopt this ‘shorthand’ to help maintain the readability of the text.

3. page 7. Too vague a sentence "systematic procedures will be used..." refine

Extensive information is provided later in the manuscript on the details of the “systematic procedures” we will use. As it feels inappropriate to repeat these in the introductory section, we have included the phrase “as described below” to this to emphasise that these details are clarified in due course (p7).

4. page 8. Why English only title and abstracts? Do the databases require an English title/abstract?

At least it would be good to see how many non-English papers were excluded in the flowchart. I guess there will not be much but it is interesting information of it can be stated. Otherwise state as limitation.

The majority of the databases we will search are English language only. In the few cases where other languages are included, English titles and abstracts are available for the majority of records. This restriction is due to limited available funds for translation. We have clarified this (p9). We will, as the
reviewer suggests, and as stated on p11, prepare tables of excluded studies “detailing when exclusion occurred and reasons for exclusion”.

5. page 11. Cochrane risk of bias tool is not cited, but is mainly designed for RCTs. Specify if using EPOC group adaptation of this tool, which also includes non RCT designs.

The manuscript contained an error in relation to which measure of quality assessment we would use. As the reviewer highlights, the most appropriate tool in this case is the EPOC adaptation of the Cochrane risk of bias tool and this is what we intend to use. We have clarified this (p11)

6. page 11. Reference 21 is a risk of bias tool for nursing studies. Reconsider its use or justify it.

See response to point 5 above. We have removed this reference.

7. Page 3 and 9. why exclude younger than 18 years (what happens if parents are stimulated to alter their child’s behaviour? Or a program aimed to the youth?) clarify / justify.

We have excluded programmes aimed specifically at young people as these have been systematically reviewed elsewhere. We exclude programmes aimed at parents designed to encourage them to take action to change their children’s health behaviours as the recipients of the incentives (parents) are different from the individuals who must change their health behaviours (children) (although parents may also be required to change some sort of behaviour in these interventions). As such, these interventions do not meet our inclusion criteria of interventions assessing the effectiveness of financial incentives given in exchange for change in health behaviour of the individual receiving the incentive. We have clarified this and included appropriate references (p9).

In addition, we have additionally listed our information scientist, Shannon Robalino, as a co-author. She helped design the methods, will perform the searches and has read and approved this version of the manuscript.

We thank the editor and reviewer for their careful consideration of our manuscript and believe that the revised version represents a significant improvement.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely

Jean Adams (on behalf of all authors)