Reviewer's report

Title: "Not just another walking program": Everyday Activity Supports You (EASY) Model - A pilot study for a parallel randomized controlled trial

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Reviewer: Graham Baker

Reviewer's report:

The authors present a well-written manuscript that appears to provide a promising intervention to increase physical activity in older women. I believe there are some major compulsory revisions that must be attempted before the manuscript can be considered for publication.

1. In relation to whether the research question posed by the authors is new, I would suggest that the authors consider restructuring their introductory section (P5, l72 onwards) to provide a stronger rationale for focusing on the target population of middle-aged to older women and the need for further intervention attempts in this area.

1a. Currently the authors provide one reference demonstrating lower rates of sedentary behavior in women, but as the authors will know sedentary behavior and physical activity are considered separate constructs and the intervention being tested here would appear to target both constructs. Hence, a clearer justification for focussing on women, in particular elderly women, is needed.

1b. The authors then state that studies are needed to evaluate the potential for inactive middle-aged women to become physically active as a means to socialize and enhance health. Yet, the authors themselves provide a reference (number 16 Hobbs et al) that demonstrates (from a systematic review of 21 trials) that significant PA behaviour change can be achieved at 12-months in older adults. Therefore it would appear that the potential has already been evaluated and demonstrated. The authors therefore need to build on these findings and show the need for further research including a justification for the particular intervention approach they are piloting here.

2. In relation to whether the research question posed by the authors is well-defined, I feel that the authors in this section (and throughout the manuscript) should be extremely clear in how they describe the purpose of their intervention; is it to reduce sitting time, increase physical activity, both or reduce sitting time via increased physical activity. At times I do not feel this is clear. For example, P5 l83 suggests a need for promoting sustainable PA models, then P6 l97 states that the EASY model has a focus on reducing sitting time and increasing utilitarian PA but in the secondary objectives (P6 l100) only examining effects on physical activity is mentioned.

3. Perhaps my most major concern with this manuscript is I am not sure that the
primary outcome is best reflected in the rest of the manuscript. Further I am not sure that the authors are actually in a position to address the primary outcome measure with the data provided in the manuscript.

Therefore, I would like to see the authors provide some more details on the recruitment phase of the study given that they state (P6, l199) that the primary objective was to assess recruitment and retention. For example, the authors states (P6, l110) that the setting has a population of approx.. 2.3M residents but under the recruitment section (P7, l125 onwards) that posters were placed in the local neighborhood library and community center. There is obviously information lacking here about a specific neighborhood/community that was used as the focal point for recruitment efforts. Therefore, we need to know why was this community selected, what was the estimated target population within this community etc. This information is essential for the authors to reach accurate conclusions about how effective their recruitment strategy was.

I do not feel that the primary aim of the study (i.e. to assess recruitment) is reflected in the main analysis of the manuscript. As an example, Foster et al, 2011 produced a review of recruitment in walking studies (International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity 2011, 8:137 doi:10.1186/1479-5868-8-137) which I think may be useful for the authors to consider. They used 4 unique stages covering the eligible pool, the invites, the initial responses and the number of starters and calculated rates for each of these stages. They also considered examining weekly recruitment rates. Therefore, I do not agree with the authors viewpoint that recruitment can simply be considered successful if between 8-15 people per group were recruited (P10, l205). If the aim of the study is to determine recruitment rates and if a larger study is feasible, then surely this should be used to gauge success of the recruitment strategies as per in Foster et al (2011)? For example, recruiting 15 individuals from a potential sample of 30 people gives a 50% recruitment rate, yet recruiting 15 individuals from 315,000 people (13.5% of the population 65+years of the 2.3M Vancouver residents) gives a recruitment rate that would indicate a study is certainly not feasible.

I would challenge the authors conclusion that they have demonstrated feasibility to recruit, as we know little about recruitment rates. Achieving a small absolute target of 8-15 individuals does not mean that a sufficient sample size would be achieved if a full RCT was conducted.

4. Whilst I am certainly not adverse to exploratory research to investigate the effects of intervention components, I do feel that the authors could provide justification for the intervention approach adopted rather than simply describing what did occur given that much as been published about how best to promote physical activity. For example, was the content based on previous interventions and adapted for this population, was this a brand new approach and if so how was it developed, were are the theoretical links between the content and theoretical framework/constructs and specific behavior change techniques that are being piloted here? The authors should also provide an explanatory note as to why a nutrition related topic was included during the activation stage of a PA
5. I would challenge the authors that this is the first intervention in this age group to specifically target a reduction in sedentary behavior. For example, I refer to this conference paper from Gardner et al, 2012 (an actual author on this EASY manuscript) that would suggest there would appear to be 1 study that targets sedentary behavior exclusively with a further 2 targeting sedentary behavior and PA. http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:285511. This relates to my earlier comments about a lack of information in the introductory section and the justification for this particular study and intervention approach.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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