Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 18 September 2014

Reviewer: Graham Baker

Reviewer's report:

GENERAL COMMENTS

I feel that the authors have made a commendable effort in addressing the comments suggestions made by the editor, the other reviewer and myself. On the whole the revised manuscript addresses these in a comprehensive fashion and specifically I am satisfied with the changes the authors have made in response to all but one of my comments (see below under major compulsory revisions). I have also reviewed the additional useful comments made by the editor and other reviewer and conclude that the authors have addressed these in a satisfactory manner in my opinion. In any instances where the authors have not revised the manuscript according to a reviewer/editor suggestion then I believe the authors have provided a sufficient justification for not doing so.

The revised manuscript provides greater justification for the study to target older women using the intervention approach adopted. There is greater clarity as to the ultimate aim of the intervention and how this is being evaluated from a theoretical perspective.

I do feel that the manuscript has merit in publication given the specialist nature of this journal in publishing pilot and feasibility studies. I would also consider that this revised manuscript achieves the 7 guidelines that the journal suggests a reviewer adopts, with the exception of guideline 5 in relation to the suggested major compulsory revision below.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS

1. In my opinion there is one outstanding issue that I feel still needs to be fully addressed by the authors; that is the potential of the data collected during the study to address the primary research objective (related to feasibility) of assessing recruitment and retention rates.

I appreciate that in this revised manuscript the authors have provided the retention statistic of individuals who completed the study, and that data displayed in text and in the CONSORT diagram has been collected to demonstrate participant flow through the study. I also appreciate that the authors now make the distinction between what is judged as successful in terms of recruitment to allow this pilot study to be conducted and successful recruitment for a larger trial (p14 of manuscript).
However, I still believe that the authors have not collected, or at least displayed here, any data that would allow them to calculate actual recruitment rates which they state is their main research objective (see pages 9, 14 of revised manuscript). Therefore, whilst a final number of individuals participating in the intervention from initial responses to the recruitment campaign, and underlying reasons for drop-out, is useful information I am unable to determine whether achieving any subsequently calculated sample size would be achievable. Additionally I do not believe the authors have really assessed the feasibility of recruiting individuals and would be able to confidently predict how to recruit participants in a larger trial. For example, there is no information on the “neighbourhood” that recruitment was focused on – how many residents live there (according to local statistics) would have been useful to know. One question that arises is, if it was collected from individuals, how they heard about the study? Was it from the posters or the newspaper adverts and how many of the recruited participants were from that neighborhood if the newspapers adverts went wider. These data are necessary in calculating recruitment rates, assessing feasibility of conducting a large-scale trial and also providing the necessary insight for the authors to design this larger trial.

However, I do not feel that this issue around recruitment rates is sufficient for the manuscript not to be published, as there are several important components to pilot and feasibility studies that this study also addresses. Nevertheless, if the authors’ primary objective is to assess feasibility for the purpose of conducting a future larger trial I do not think they cover this issue satisfactorily in this revised manuscript. If the above information has not been collected then I feel this should be acknowledged as a limitation and potentially a revision of the main aims of this particular manuscript. I do not think that the main finding that the authors “demonstrated interest in our study” is a satisfactory conclusion. Can the authors conclude that it is feasible to conduct this intervention on a larger-scale?

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

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