Reviewer’s report

Title: eCROPS-CA: a systematic approach toward effective and sustainable cancer prevention in rural China

Version: 6 Date: 20 October 2014

Reviewer: Johanna E. Maree

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this proposal. I want to congratulate the researchers with this novel approach to include the nine most common cancers in their cancer prevention intervention and not focus on only a single cancer.

No major compulsory revisions recommended.

The minor essential and discretionary revisions are:

1) The background of the study presents cancer and cancer prevention. The background does not introduce the health care system of China, what is done in terms of cancer prevention and which screening opportunities are available to the rural population. Also, what is the doctor patient ratio in the clinics? - an important question when taking the labor intensity of this project into consideration. Some of these questions are answered in the discussion and maybe this could be moved to the background (Discretionary revision).

2) In addition, nothing is said about the farming community - the target population of the study. What is of importance is the educational level of the farmers as the intervention rests on health education, behavior change and completing questionnaires (Minor essential revision).

3) In addition, the participating farmers would need to visit the clinics and it is not clear whether these clinics are easily accessible and what means of transport farmers use to get to the clinics. It is also not clear why one of the inclusion criteria is that the farmers should live in the village for more than six months per year – do they normally migrate? What about internet access as webpages are used in the study? (Minor essential revision).

4) The study design is appropriate and congruent with the primary aim of the study.

5) Two aims are presented: one pertaining to the eCROPS-CA and one to establish a sustainable mechanism integrating cancer prevention into routine medical services. Although this is mentioned as secondary objective, the current proposal does not inform the reader how this aim would be assessed. I would suggest that the first aim be reformulated as it seems as if the researchers have already decided that the intervention, which seems to be a pilot test, would be effective. Maybe the researchers could rather say that the study aims to evaluate the effect of the eCROPS-CA? (Minor essential revision of study aims).
6) It is said in line 284 that this study tries to test and refine important features. What I miss is the voice of the rural doctors and farmers – should they not also give their input in terms of the feasibility of the study and the practical problems they might have experienced? It is said that this study provides the opportunity to tailor intervention to the individual’s dynamic risk status and influence these factors (line 356) but nothing of the individual’s experience of the intervention – something that might be a risk for the intervention. (Discretionary revision).

7) The selection and randomization of the villages are clear. Eligibility criteria are clear.

8) I am however concerned about the language used in the two questionnaires – RRA and DRA. Would a person of low literacy understand the meaning of the terminology used in these questionnaires? (Please consider health literacy). In addition, not all the questions seem to be applicable to cancer. Do the researchers have an idea of how long the completion of these questionnaires (RRA and DRA) would take? I am also not sure who would administer these questionnaires. (Discretionary revision)

9) The sample size is well described and the statistical analyses are appropriate to determine whether the intervention would be effective.

10) The intervention is well described. I am however not sure where the counseling would take place. Would it be expected of the farmers to go to the clinic on a monthly basis for the counseling? Would it be possible for them? What about the time and additional cost if any? The educational level of the farmers is once again pertinent considering the use of leaflets and webpages. (Minor essential revision).

11) The performance based incentives are well described – however, the research team might have difficulty “selling” participation in the study if the time needed for one year- case is not known. Does the team have any idea?

12) Four measures would be used to assess the outcomes of the intervention; cancer diagnosis, cancer related KAP (instrument to determine this is not included- the research would have to give the detail pertaining to this instrument) easy biophysical indicators and intervention compliance – which are clear and appropriate. (Minor essential revision)

13) The evaluation time points are clearly described.
I am sure the research team thought of all the practical problems which might arise and have means to address it. So, best wishes for successfully completing this study.

Please check for typographical errors.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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