Author’s response to reviews

Title: Using New Technologies to Promote Weight Management: A Randomised Controlled Trial Study Protocol

Authors:

Monica Jane (monica.jane@postgrad.curtin.edu.au)
Jonathan Foster (J.Foster@curtin.edu.au)
Martin S Hagger (Martin.Hagger@curtin.edu.au)
Sebely Pal (S.Pal@curtin.edu.au)

Version: 2 Date: 18 March 2015

Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Mr Proel Vargas
Editor-in-Chief
BMC Public Health

Re: Response to reviewers

Thank you for your email of 10 March 2015. The above journal paper has now been revised as recommended. Each of the reviewer’s comments has been addressed individually in the section below. Each point provides a brief description of the changes made in the text in accordance with the reviewer’s comments, as well as the page and line number where these changes can be located in the manuscript. The changes are highlighted in red in the manuscript.

In compliance with the additional editorial requests: a) the full postal address of the submitting author has now been updated; and b) the date of registration has been included alongside our Trial Registration Number (TRN) (page 2, line 34; and page 8, line 171). These changes are also highlighted in red in the manuscript.

If there are any further comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Associate Professor Sebely Pal
Reviewer 1 Comments

This is an interesting paper describing the design of a randomized trial comparing two active interventions for weight loss to a control group. The two active interventions include a facebook based and a pamphlet based intervention. Although the topic is important, the paper can be more helpful to the readers if the authors considering addressing the following comments.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The introduction is nice in that the review is thorough, however, it may not be necessary in this case. A shorter and more concise review may be better.

Thank you for this comment. We have now edited the introduction accordingly (page 3, from line 42).

2. The authors stated that studies with a dietary component and those using social media is scarce, however, many health intervention studies using facebook have been conducted previously. The authors should discuss how and why their study will perform better than previous studies.

We acknowledge that many interactive, internet-based health intervention studies that have been conducted have included a social element, these usually provide feedback to participants from sources other than from other participants. The point we wish to make is that there are not many studies that specifically target dietary and physical activity changes for weight loss delivered via the social media platform (and not just the internet), with the only form of feedback being from other participants (eg social support). We have now clarified this point in the introduction (page 5, line 101), and in the discussion (page 12, line 270, 272). We discuss how and why we believe our study will perform better than previous studies in the discussion section (page 12, from line 267).

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The authors are encouraged to send the paper to be edited by a professional editor.

Reviewer 2 Comments

Overall, this paper is well written and provides a clear and useful description of the proposed project. However, the protocol needs to demonstrate awareness of and adherence to the relevant CONSORT guidelines for trial design and reporting.

Major Compulsory Revisions

The paper does not currently mention the relevant CONSORT guidelines; following these is compulsory for publication of protocols in BMC. As a result, some essential protocol details have been omitted – most notably, details of concealment of allocation in randomisation and blinding of data collection and analysis.

We acknowledge the oversight, and have made the relevant corrections to the study protocol section relating to the randomisation procedure (page 8, line 176) according to the CONSORT guidelines. The data collection will not be blinded as participants need to collect the questionnaires from the research coordinator to complete at each time point relevant to their group allocation. This point has been
clarified in the assessments section (page 11, line 234). The data analysis will be performed blind, and
this point has been added to the statistical analysis section (page 12, line 264).

Minor Essential Revisions

I was only able to be certain from reading the Appendices that the content of the Facebook-delivered
and pamphlet-delivered interventions would be identical, except for the Facebook
facilitated/moderated peer forum and additional instructions on engaging with this for the Facebook
intervention group – it would be helpful to the reader to make this explicit more prominently in the
paper itself.

Thank you for drawing our attention to this omission. This point has now been included in the
manuscript (page 8, line 183).

Discretionary Revisions

The Discussion section currently strongly favours the hypothesis that use of Facebook will enhance
intervention effects, which seems premature. In advance of the trial results, it might be better to adopt
the conventional ‘equipoise’ position for a trial, that Facebook use may or may not enhance intervention
effects (as there is actually evidence that many people do not like or benefit from online peer
interaction when attempting behaviour change).

We have used the discussion to explain how and why we believe our study will perform better than
previous studies (page 12, line 267), as also referred to in Reviewer 1 Comment 2. However, changes to
the wording have been made to reflect a more equipoise position, as suggested (page 12, lines 274, 276;
page 13, line 279, 287, 294, 296).