Author’s response to reviews

Title: Findings from an exploration of a social network intervention to promote diet quality and health behaviours in older adults with COPD: a feasibility study

Authors:

Ilse Bloom (ib2@mrc.soton.ac.uk)
Lindsay Welch (Lindsay.Welch@soton.ac.uk)
Ivaylo Vassilev (I.I.Vassilev@soton.ac.uk)
Anne Rogers (A.E.Rogers@soton.ac.uk)
Karen Jameson (kaj@mrc.soton.ac.uk)
Cyrus Cooper (cc@mrc.soton.ac.uk)
Sian Robinson (Sian.Robinson@newcastle.ac.uk)
Janis Baird (jb@mrc.soton.ac.uk)

Version: 2 Date: 19 Dec 2019

Reviewer reports:

Reviewer #2: I am happy with the replies to reviewers' comments and to the changes.
Response: We thank the reviewer for their comments and have made the necessary corrections to the manuscript as suggested.

It is not clear why this study is a sub-study of another overarching 'pilot' study (as indicated in the CONSORT diagram). This needs to be clarified in the text.
Response: We apologise for our error in the CONSORT diagram where we had previously described the overarching study as a ‘pilot’ study, when it is in fact a ‘feasibility’ study, as indicated throughout the paper, and defined as a piece of research done before the main study to assess whether this study can be done and, if so, how (Hallingberg, B., Turley, R., Segrott, J. et al. Exploratory studies to decide whether and how to proceed with full-scale evaluations of public health interventions: a systematic review of guidance. Pilot Feasibility Stud 4, 104 (2018). It is anticipated that new MRC/NIHR guidance on feasibility studies is about to be published, which might help to further clarify this definition (Moore, G. F., Evans, R. E., Hawkins, J., Littlecott, H., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Bonell, C., & Murphy, S. (2019). From complex social interventions to interventions in complex social systems: Future directions and unresolved questions for intervention development and evaluation. Evaluation, 25(1), 23–45). We apologise for our error in the CONSORT diagram and have now amended this (page 9, Figure 1). We have now added further clarification to the text (page 7, lines 144-157) – this sub-study is embedded in an overarching larger feasibility study and, in addition to the wider aim of assessing the feasibility of the intervention in an older population with COPD and of
scaling this study up into a larger future study, the sub-study aimed to try out an additional questionnaire (to collect data on health behaviours, including diet) and to develop process evaluation methods that could be used in a larger future study.

Page 7 Please provide further explanation as to the purpose and difference between this sub-study and the main pilot study in which it is embedded.
Response: Please see our previous response. We have now added further explanation regarding the purpose of the sub-study and difference between this sub-study and the overarching feasibility study in which it is embedded (page 7, lines 144-157).

Is this study an internal pilot study? If so please make this clear in the title and text and give the reason why it was needed. Please give a rationale as to why patient-centred baseline and outcome data are being analysed at this stage (as for an internal pilot this would not happen until the end of the overarching study unless for sample size adjustment). If an additional questionnaire is being tried out here (line 148) and this is the reason for the sub-study and only this data are being analysed here then please make this clear.

If this study is not an internal pilot (ie the subjects do not continue to be part of the overarching study n=60) then please make this clear. This does not seem to be the case, neither does this study appear to be a SWAT.
Response: Previously we had incorrectly described the overarching study as a ‘pilot’ study in the CONSORT diagram, when it is in fact a ‘feasibility’ study, as indicated throughout the paper. We apologise for our error and have amended the CONSORT diagram (page 9, Figure 1) accordingly. We have now added further clarification to the text (page 7, lines 144-157) – an additional questionnaire to collect data on health behaviours, including diet, was tried out in the sub-study, which was the main reason for it, and only the health behaviour outcome data were analysed here.