Reviewer's report

Title: Response rates to a mailed survey of representative cancer patients: incentive and length effects.

Version: 2 Date: 20 January 2010

Reviewer: Timothy J Beebe

Reviewer's report:

The current offering is much improved from the last submission. Some concerns still remain, however.

• The introduction and discussion need to be tightened up and could benefit from further editing and a deeper review of the extant literature (there is a lot more out there dealing with the issues of incentive and length in the health survey literature). The introduction still comes off as a bit meandering. It might help if the research questions were dropped or summarized in a single paragraph. The discussion should weave in the results of existing research better to contextualize the current findings. The discussion of telephone surveys in the intro should mention the problem of cell phone-only households as a weakness of this mode. Finally, I disagree with the other reviewer’s suggestion to morph the incentive amounts into current denominations based on inflation-adjusted rates. It is also atypical and distracting.

• While I understand the rationale for retaining both RR2 and RR4, inclusion of both is distracting and unnecessary, from this reviewer’s perspective. I would recommend choosing just one and sticking with it.

• As indicated in my last review, the thrust of the paper should be on the manipulated variables (incentive and questionnaire length) and one non-manipulated variable (cancer type). The other results, interactions and non-significant findings, can be summarized briefly in the text. This will make the contribution more apparent, cut down on tables, and make the whole manuscript tighter.

• Although referenced indirectly, more formal mention of Groves’ leverage-saliency theory should be included. It is likely explaining the response rate differences across cancer types.

• The “willingness to participate in future studies” element is still mentioned in the statistical analysis section although the authors dropped it from the balance of the paper.

• I don’t see a need for the item nonresponse analyses to be weighted/adjusted for differential nonresponse by stage 4 cancer and African American respondents.

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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'