Reviewer's report

Title: A randomised trial and economic evaluation of the effect of response mode on response rate, response bias, and item non-response in a survey of doctors

Version: 3 Date: 17 June 2011

Reviewer: Jeanette Ziegenfuss

Reviewer's report:

The revised manuscript is much improved and better situated in the literature. Thank you for the opportunity to review again. Specific comments follow.

Minor essential revisions:
• While you present the distribution of the responses by actual mode of completion in Table 5, this concept needs to be carried out throughout. When looking at things like item nonresponse, for example, the mode of completion can be thought of as more important than the contact protocol. At the very least this line of thinking should be addressed in the discussion.
• While you appropriately include a cost per complete analysis, it would be helpful to introduce this earlier in the manuscript itself and in the abstract. This provides a common metric to simultaneously consider the response rate and the cost.
• Abstract, results: I found the discussion of bias hard to follow and the conclusions drawn from it not entirely explicit.
• Methods, paragraph 1: The discussion of logging on seems misplaced and would be better suited after an introduction to the overall study design.
• The length of the questionnaire varies by type of MD. This could be an important confounder that should be discussed and included as a study limitation.
• Results, paragraph 2: The incentive should be introduced and fully described in the methods.
• Discussion, paragraph 3: The statement that paper surveys are more convenient and flexible is speculative – paper also requires the additional step of physically getting the survey to a mailbox.

Minor discretionary revisions:
• You discuss the relationship between response rate and bias. Another important consideration that you may want to address is that between response rate and statistical power resultant from the number of completed cases.
• Background, end of paragraph 3: You discuss the issue of an MD not getting an email that is addressed to them, there is some speculation in the literature that this is also a problem in mailed surveys that you may want to address.

Minor editing issues:
• Use decimal points consistently throughout for your reported estimates.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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