Reviewer's report

Title: Using e-mail recruitment and an online questionnaire to establish effect size

Version: 1 Date: 1 January 2011

Reviewer: Ramal Moonesinghe

Reviewer's report:

The authors discuss a strategy to estimate a suitable effect size to use in a sample size calculation for a randomized controlled trial.

Major compulsory revisions

1) The authors have to define their "effect size of interest" in the methods section. It seems the effect size here is the increase in recruitment rate to the trial.

2) The trial aims to identify the level of information needed by patients in order to decide whether or not to participate in a treatment trial. This trial involves a sample of patients not researchers (page 4, methods section). Is the effect size estimated used to calculate a sample size of patients or a sample size of researchers to evaluate the intervention?

3) The respondents to the survey estimate the increase in recruitment rates based on baseline recruitment rates and also the cost of intervention. Their estimates are not based on the level of information needed by patients to participate in the trial. This has to be clearly explained in the methods section.

4) The researchers will be using the intervention in their research. Is it possible to expect an increase in recruitment rate (effect size) using an intervention based on their own assessment? There are differences in estimates of effect size even between research fellows and senior research fellows. Are there any references to conclude that the increase in recruitment rate in an actual trial due to an intervention can be based on expert (researchers') opinion?

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.