Reviewer's report

Title: Challenges to be Overcome using Population-Based Sampling Methods to Recruit Veterans for a Study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury

Version: 1  Date: 9 November 2013

Reviewer: Margaret AK Ryan

Reviewer's report:

This is a very well written manuscript on a topic that will be of interest to those involved in study recruitment and follow-up.

My primary concerns (may be considered for major compulsory revision) include the following:

1. I respectfully disagree with the authors’ conclusion that TBI patients, once contacted, were less likely to complete screening (Results, Discussion). As per Table 2, if one includes those with TBI-and-PTSD as having TBI, then there is no statistically significant difference in completing screening based on TBI status. Some text revision is recommended, since data do not support a conclusion that prior head injury actually affected follow-up in this project.

2. I also take some issue with conclusion that contact challenges were “the most important” issues affecting the very low enrollment achieved. Contact challenges were clearly important, since 67% of the potential sample was lost at contact stage. However, one also observes that 84% of those contacted failed to enroll. This implies that recruitment challenges extended well beyond contact. This already-consented study population appeared very much unable or unwilling to engage in what the investigators asked of them. Discussion may be better focused on some of these post-contact challenges.

3. Related to the above observation, I was concerned to see no discussion of incentives or compensation that may have influenced [low] enrollment in this project. These issues seem important for a study that asks for substantial time and engagement from participants.

4. Finally, the authors make several Discussion notes about a lack of published literature on contact and follow-up of veterans. I respectfully refer them to these citations and others from the Millennium Cohort Study:


Secondary concerns and questions (may be considered for minor or
1. Table 5 shows that 23 participants enrolled. All text (Abstract, Results, Discussion) states that 24 enrolled. Because the non-enrolled are otherwise accounted in Table 5, this may not be a simple typographical error. Reexamination of data to resolve the discrepancy is recommended.

2. In Table 4, it is unclear how any members could be too old, since age would have been known before inviting these already-consented participants into the MIND Study.

3. Also in Table 4, it is unclear why “sub-threshold PTSD” would make participants ineligible. Many who enrolled had no PTSD, and specific diagnostic thresholds are not shown in the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

I hope these comments are helpful. I appreciate the opportunity to review this interesting and important work.

**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.