Reviewer's report

Title: Multi-step, repeated contact methods, but not personalized contact strategies, improved time to survey completion: evaluation of two sequential randomized trials

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Reviewer: Mark Mikkelsen

Reviewer's report:

Dinglas and colleagues examined whether personalized contact strategies improved time to survey completion in a sequential randomized trial design. The authors found these strategies were not associated with faster time to completion. In addition, the authors examined whether clinical characteristics were associated with response times and found that older age and white race were associated with faster time to completion.

Perhaps most importantly, the authors highlight the effectiveness of a multi-modality strategy and the need for persistence to contact and recruit patients. For critical care trials, these are important findings.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Study Design: The objective of the study was to evaluate the effects of different strategies for contacting patients. The introduction and methods suggest that only response times were examined; however, the manuscript also presents response rates (apparently a secondary outcome). Please revise your introduction, methods, and discussion to note that the study examined whether the personalized strategy improved response rates as well as response times (and found that the strategy did neither).

2. Generalizability: One interpretation of the study is that personalized contact strategies did not improve time to survey completion in ARDS survivors who were previously enrolled in a very comprehensive trial (by the same investigators) and were now being asked to participate in a new study (albeit related) that sought for them to complete a brief, health insurance survey.
   a. Is it not conceivable that a personalized strategy would in fact shorten response time had these patients NOT already been enrolled in a lengthy study or had the “ask” been something of more consequence? Please address these issues in your discussion.

3. Please revise the introduction. For unclear reasons (perhaps a prior review), the authors dedicate a significant amount of the introduction detailing the work of Chen et al. Consequently, the presentation is slightly distracting and unnecessarily undermines your own work. Please consider reframing your introduction to more efficiently summarize what is known and not known in this realm, then feel free to expand on this (as needed) in your discussion.
Minor Essential Revisions:

1. Regarding potential explanations for why younger patients had a slower time to survey completion, is it not also possible that these subjects were more likely to have moved (consistent with the notion that the delay was due to initial contacts being made via mail). Please consider including this potential explanation.

**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.