Reviewer's report

Title: Recruitment of ethnic minority patients to a cardiac rehabilitation trial: The Birmingham Rehabilitation Uptake Maximisation (BRUM) study [ISRCTN72884263]

Version: 1 Date: 9 March 2005

Reviewer: Tim Allison

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors have tackled an important question in the context of a clinical trial. There is a need for research in this area, but the information provided from this paper as it stands is a little limited. There are two key questions which the authors need more justification to answer.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. First key question is how can we know anything about the people who were excluded? They could have differed from those not excluded in their willingness to participate, but the study does not appear to address this. It is no surprise that people are excluded from the study when it has no language facilities to deal with them and this does not tell us anything. The real challenge is to recruit the people from the communities that the study was not equipped to address. If the authors have any further information about this population they should present it, or at the very least comment on the issue with reference to the literature. 70% of an albeit small number of Bangladeshis were excluded. This could be a major issue for some communities and there is no evidence about whether provision of Bangla and Sylheti would have made a difference. The authors have not demonstrated in a meaningful way what they claim in the first sentence of the second paragraph of the discussion. It is strictly speaking true for this study, but only because they do not know about inequality of refusal among people who were ineligible because of language. The statement is not generalisable as it stands. This area should be taken into account in revision of discussion and conclusion.

2. Second key question is whether the difference in the reason for refusal is important. 42% of South Asians did not give a reason for refusal compared with 18% of Whites. There is no comment on this. The authors should make some comment since it may have practical implications.

3. The authors should include more detail about the implications of the study and what it would practically mean for others - the "So what?" question. Do they recommend that researchers should look at more languages or are they really staying on the fence?

Other necessary changes:

Table 1: Percentages are confusing with the percentages in the "All presenting" row reading across the table while the others are mostly a percentage of each ethnic group. There needs to be a more consistent and better explained use of the figures in brackets in the table.

Table 2: Again there should be more consistency about the figures in brackets. The top cells imply that they are all %, but some are SD or CI. I suggest removing (%) from the top cells. Also, in the Bangladeshi column percentages are used from a small total population. 4 is 66% of 6, but is
misleading because of the tiny number and % should be omitted.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Abstract line 4: "are" is missing

Background line 2: poor sentence construction

References: volume number should be in bold but title not in bold?

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests