Reviewer's report

Title: A randomised controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of offering study results as an incentive to increase response rates to postal questionnaires.

Version: 1 Date: 30 May 2005

Reviewer: Andrew M Garratt

Reviewer's report:

General
This article presents evidence for effectiveness of offering participants the results of the study as a means of enhancing response rates. Overall the study is well conducted and while specific factors may limit the generalisability of the findings, there is little evidence for methods of enhancing response rates and the authors do discuss the limitations of their study design.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

1 Background
The meta analysis to which the authors refer includes one health related study. Is it worth briefly describing the relevance of the results of this study?

2 Methods study population
This study represents a trial within a trial. The flow of patients in such studies can often be difficult for the reader to follow. The authors adequately describe the conduct of the survey methods trial but I would like more information about the responders/non-responders to the parent trial. The group participating in the survey methods trial have already agreed to take part in the parent study and if as a result of this participation they represent a special group then this has implications for the generalisability of the study results; not least because in this survey methods trial subjects are being offered the study results at a later date. It seems reasonable to assume that in the majority of studies, subjects will be offered study results at the outset, before agreeing to participate. This issue should be taken up in the Discussion/Study Limitations.

3 Methods - outcome
It is not entirely clear from the text when the reminders were mailed - three and six weeks?

4 Methods - outcome
Have the authors considered looking at secondary outcomes, particularly the number of reminders used in the two study arms? This gives some indication of respondent motivation as well as important information relating to costs.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

1 Abstract (Methods)
Second sentence should be simplified The main outcome measure was the response rate.

2 Background
The authors present three possible reasons for why offering results might improve response rates. Are there any available references for these reasons?

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 of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.