Reviewer's report

Title: Increasing Recruitment to Randomised Trials: A Review of Randomised Controlled Trials

Version: 1 Date: 12 April 2006

Reviewer: Peter Bower

Reviewer's report:

General

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

None

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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)

1. It was not clear to me why Farrin (reference 23) was discussed at the end of the paper, but not included in the main review. Was it excluded? And if so, why?

2. The relationship between data in the tables and Forest plots is not always clear. For example, in the plot, the numbers for Kendrick are 217/1203 and 157/1190, while in the table, the numbers seem to be reported as 259/1203 and 166/1190. Some of the data presented in the table seems to involve both sample size of the randomised groups and the outcomes, whereas for other studies this is not the case. These differences need to be clarified. It may be preferable to include the numbers in each arm in the Forest plot alone, and remove the data from the table.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

3. It might be helpful to explain exactly what is meant by ‘open’ in ‘open versus placebo control’, for readers who may not be familiar with this terminology.

4. ‘Person recruiting or visiting’ might be relabelled ‘Type of recruitment personnel’

5. I wondered if the study on the trial co-ordinator visiting clinical sites was best placed here. I would generally see that as an example of ‘trial administration’, and might be better placed in that section with the trial of internet versus paper records. I think this may need to be distinguished from the person dealing face to face with patients.

6. Similarly, I wondered if the label ‘Recruitment approach’ was better relabelled as ‘Strategies for contacting patients’.

7. The placement of the oncology trial (reference 16) is difficult, as it could be seen as relating to contact strategies, or might be placed in the section on ‘Type of recruitment personnel’, as both aspects are part of the intervention.
8. I wondered if the recent BMJ publication on payment to healthcare professionals might at least be referenced, for completeness. J Bryant and J Powell. Payment to healthcare professionals for patient recruitment to trials: a systematic review BMJ, Dec 2005; 331:

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I have conducted work with one of the authors, and had peer reviewed a previous version of this paper. I do not consider that these represent a serious conflict of interest