Reviewer's report

Title: Motives for (not) participating in a lifestyle intervention trial

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Reviewer: James LoGerfo

Reviewer's report:

This article reports on factors associated with a decision to not participate in a cardiovascular risk reduction trial known as ALANT for which there were a total of 877 eligible patients, but for which 729 (83%) did not choose to participate. The intent of this study was to add to our knowledge about the representativeness of the sub-set of eligibles who choose to participate in a behavioral intervention for cardiovascular disease (CVD). They addressed the issue by developing a survey instrument which was then offered to a sample of both participants (Ps) and non-participants (NPs) and also used some data in the clinical data base in their analyses.

The primary strength of this article is that the authors were able to get survey responses from 77% of the persons who they were able to contact and who had chosen to not participate in the ATLANT study.

Major Revisions:

1) The authors state that people who chose to participate in the study would have a financial contribution of 150 Euros if they entered and were randomized to the behavioral intervention. I am not aware of other research projects which require a payment of so much money in order to get the intervention; and thus am skeptical that factors associated with participation in this study have any significant generalisability. Most studies of which I am aware cover all costs of participation, and also cover some time costs as well. Some comments are required about this level of cost and how it may compare to other studies.

2) For this report, it would be important to also know how the 77% NP sample who responded compared to the other 23% of NPs contacted, but who wouldn’t return NP survey forms based on factors known to the authors from the eligibility data base in terms of age, disease burden etc.

3) There is no statement made about how the samples were drawn for this study were they random samples?

4) Since the main ATLANT study had differential recruitment rates based on whether Ps were invited by their physician vs from the databases; the NPs should have been similarly stratified or at least analyzed to see if NPs related to the 2 recruitment methods are similar. Some comment required.

5) It is stated that all those who could be contacted and were initially
invited in both the P and NP groups agreed to participate in the survey (with 50/65 Ps eventually doing so). There is no indication about how many people were non-contactable in order to get 65 to initially agree. Were all reachable in both groups?

Minor revisions:
6) The term “sedentary” lifestyle is a bit harsh as used in this study. They used criteria that most would consider as “sufficiently active for CV health, and all others were “sedentary.” There is a trend now to discriminate lower levels of regular activity compared to no-regular PA. A better term might be “not meeting recommended levels” or add some comments about choice.

7) Since Ps would potentially need to pay 150 Euros if randomized to the intervention, the lack of data about income level is a significant flaw; and more comment about this lack is warranted.

8) The figure about ATLANT enrollment appears to be mislabeled since it refers to respondents rather than participants

Discretionary Revisions:
9) Based on the data about education level there is reason to believe that the concept of socio-economic “class” may also be at play; and even if they didn’t measure job type or income, this could be commented on in the discussion. This is reinforced by the identified effect of “still working.” This focus is of importance in studies of CV disease because of the interest in reducing gaps in CV health across the socio-economic spectrum. A comment or two might be useful.

10) There are some awkward grammatical constructions, and additional editing is suggested.

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 limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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