Reviewer's report

Title: Comparing Recruitment Strategies in a Study of Acupuncture for Chronic Back Pain

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Reviewer: Suzanne McDonough

Reviewer's report:

Suzanne McDonough, Professor of Health and Rehabilitation, School of Health Sciences, University of Ulster, N Ireland.

Thank you for asking me to review this interesting paper on recruitment strategies. This paper explores whether there are any differences in the characteristics of people or their outcome depending on the recruitment approach used. The two approaches compared are two strategies commonly used in clinical trials of primary care populations, and so the results of this paper are relevant to all researchers working in this field of study.

This paper is well written and clear, I only have a few discretionary comments.

Discretionary Revisions
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Yes
3. Are the data sound?
The data and analyses seem to be sound.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Yes
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes, although I found the section on page 12/13 hard to follow i.e. ‘because we could not distinguish between acute and chronic back pain using the diagnosis included in electronic medical record, we cannot estimate how representative the responders to mailed invitations were to the group who sought care’.

If this statement is accurate it is unclear to me how they were able to identify that their group of patients met the inclusion criteria for chronic low back pain? Perhaps the authors could clarify this statement. Could you also please clarify the following, I thought the group who sought care were the group who received the mailed invitations?

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes, depending on their response to point 6 above about being able to accurately identify their sample as those with chronic low back pain.

9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes, there is only one minor error, double full stop on page 8

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.