Reviewer's report

Title: Trials and Tribulations of Recruiting 2,000 Older Women onto a Clinical Trial Investigating Falls and Fractures: Recruitment and Methodology of the Vital D Study

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Reviewer: A. John Campbell

Reviewer's report:

This paper reports on the strategies used to recruit 2317 participants 70 years and over into a placebo controlled trial of yearly vitamin D3 to prevent falls and fractures. The paper also reports on study methodology and participant characteristics.

Strengths of the paper:

1) Recruitment is an important issue and, as the authors point out, one on which the success of any trial is totally dependent

2) The authors have used a variety of recruitment methods and are able to contrast the success rate of each. Their findings will be of value to researchers embarking on similar projects. If possible, a financial analysis, with a report on the cost effectiveness of the different methods would be very useful as a complementary paper

3) The paper contains practical suggestions and the methods the researchers have used are comprehensive and innovative

Areas for clarification:

1) the major purpose of the paper is to describe the recruitment methods. The authors also describe the study methodology and characteristics of the participants. I found the detail given on study methodology detracted from the major purpose and focus of the paper and, where not relevant to recruitment, I feel would be better omitted.

2) the authors do not describe in any detail the methodology of this particular study and paper, namely, how they investigated recruitment. How did the researchers determine the method of recruitment? Was there a specific question asked at the time of first consultation? Did individual people hear about the study through more than one method so that targeted mail out without reinforcement through other strategies might be less effective? Did those who were recruited through mail out also discuss the study with their general practitioners so that general practitioner awareness of the study would still be important?

3) Although the median age of those recruited by the different methods was the same was the age range different. Were the very old as likely to be recruited by
this method?

4) the change from 2% to 7% success following the modification to the mail out is very important. No figures or other details about what alerted the researchers to the need for change are given and this information may be useful for readers. More detail about the change in order and wording would be of interest to those designing such requests. A copy of the mail out would be of interest (and save the authors a lot of requests for copies).

5) 10% of participants withdrew. Did the method of recruitment influence this?

Minor points; “rites” should be “rights” in the abstract and paper conclusions. “effect(ed)” should be “affect(ed)” on pages 4 and 5

In summary, this is a very interesting paper of practical value to researchers. I feel it would be strengthened by a greater focus on its main purpose of reporting on the value of different recruitment methods.