Reviewer's report

**Title:** Reduction of missed appointments at an urban primary care clinic: a randomised controlled study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 27 July 2010

**Reviewer:** Tim Holt

**Reviewer's report:**

I enjoyed reading this manuscript and would recommend publication following some revisions. It describes a study of a sequential intervention to reduce missed appointments in a hospital-affiliated medical clinic.

The study was well conducted and the results support other evidence that such interventions are beneficial.

There are some limitations, including the problem of missing outcome data which was unfortunate but is recognised by the authors.

One issue that I don't think is clear concerns the proportion of participants who actually have a mobile or fixed phone. Participants would generally have been unaware of the study, other than through posters displayed in the clinic. They did not actively 'report' anything. Therefore, the availability of mobile and fixed phones was not actually known, only I assume the availability of phone numbers recorded at the clinic. Patients may prefer to give only one phone number to the clinic rather than both mobile and fixed phone numbers. It seems unlikely to me that so few people (6%) had both types of phone. I expect that in fact many had chosen to provide only the mobile number to the clinic. If I am correct, the text needs to state this more clearly. For instance, instead of stating that "55.7% (n=586) of patients reported having a mobile phone" it should state that "55.7% (n=586) of patients had a mobile phone number recorded at the clinic." Similarly, in the Abstract, the statement that "Only 61.7% patients reported having a cell phone" needs adjusting. This is not a problem for the study, in fact, the success of the intervention strengthens the case for optimising the availability of phone numbers for this purpose.

I felt that the economic evaluation was very limited, and only just worth including. The economic implications are of course important and need discussing. However, the analysis given is very much dependent on the health care setting. If a missed appointment costs the clinic in Switzerland 80 Euros then this is clearly a figure that can be used to balance the costs of administering the intervention. However, in everyday practice the work would be done by an administrative staff member, not a research assistant, and the benefits would include reductions in otherwise wasted physician time, etc. We do not know how many of the actual missed appointments led to subsequent re-bookings, for instance, and this is relevant to a full health economic analysis. In UK general practice, patients do not pay for appointments, so wasted time is more relevant than financial losses. I think the authors need to recognise the limitations of this economic evaluation.
more clearly. Whilst avoiding wasted clinician time is important, it would be seen as extravagant in UK general practice to have a member of staff spend 3-4 hours a day generating reminders, for a turnover of 12600 consultations/year (equivalent to a smaller than average general practice in the UK). In fact, in my own practice (which provides 800-900 doctor consultations/week) we restrict our reminders to SMS only and these are automatically generated by the clinical software, with minimal cost implications in terms of staff time. So in a different setting the economic implications may be very different and this needs acknowledging in an international journal.

Further minor points:
Fisher is incorrectly spelt Fischer beneath Table 2.
Page 9: "Difference level of 0.05 or less was considered statistically significant." I think this should be "P values of 0.05 or less were considered statistically significant."
In the Abstract, when describing the sequential intervention I think "1. phone call reminder" should be "1. phone call (fixed or mobile) reminder".
Also in the Abstract, "SMS" should be "Short Message Service (SMS)" for readers who do not know this abbreviation. It is given later in the text but needs to also be given in the Abstract.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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