Reviewer's report

Title: Preconception counselling for the general population initiated by general practitioners in the Netherlands (ISRCTN53942912).

Version: 4 Date: 14 March 2006

Reviewer: Leo P. P ten Kate

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The title is misleading. This is not on preconception counseling but on some preparation for it. A better title would be: General practitioners' ability to assess which women of reproductive age should be invited for preconception counseling
2. In the abstract the objective of the paper and the objective of the study are confused. The last one should be chosen
3. It is completely unclear why a randomization was done. It should be mentioned that this study was a small part of a larger study for which randomization was necessary (and why). This small part could have been done without randomization. This should be mentioned in the methods section, but left out from the abstract as being redundant
4. The conclusion in the abstract does not follow from the results. So in fact these are results too. The conclusion should be that GP’s were not good at inviting women of reproductive age for PCC and that they should change the way they did it or that we should just bypass them.
5. What were the 11 strata used for matching?
6. Over the years partners and circumstances can change, but there was no new evaluation of these items over the years. So why was this not taken into account?
7. All pregnancies were monitored. Since this is frequently said after discussing some subgroup it would be more appropriate to state explicitly that this applies to all women of reproductive age in the 30 practices
8. In the results section it is not clear whether the 19% who responded only after receiving the offer several times are included in the response rate of 56% or whether they are additional to that 56%
9. page 10. What is said about table 5 does not agree with the heading of table 5 (2000? 2002?)
10. page 11, 3rd paragraph. It is not clear what you are meaning. Please rephrase
11. page 13: you mention four ways to increase uptake (not interest), but forget about the fifth way mentioned earlier (local health authority)
12. Table 1 Explain the difference in numbers of risk-assessment questionnaire sent and numbers intended to get pregnant within one year.

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 is mentioned in the abstract and elsewhere that the women were requested to indicate whether they were interested in PCC, and, if so, when. This when is imprecise as the women were not asked when they wanted to have PCC, but when they wanted to become pregnant.
2. page 7 top line: change ‘was’ into ‘had to be’
3. page 7 line 9 from top: counseling does not only comprise information on risk factors but also on means to prevent possible harm
4. page 12 line 7 from top. Please insert ‘within’ between ‘occurring’ and ‘one’
5. page 12 bottom line: change ‘in’ into ‘is’
6. Table 2 change 1,3048 into 13,048

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. It is incorrect and misleading to call this a low-risk population. It is an unknown-risk population
2. 1st sentence of the introduction: change malformation into abnormality. Many of these abnormalities are not malformations.
3. Page 9 third paragraph: Move reference to table 1 to the end of the first sentence
4. Many of the references are in Dutch. If there are no better alternatives I would suggest, if the editor agrees, to translate these titles in English, perhaps between square brackets, followed by ‘(in Dutch)’ with or without ‘with English summary’ added to it
5. Also I would suggest not to refer to a thesis but to the appropriate paper(s) in an international journal.
6. Reference 13. Is this really the title of the journal, or part of the advertisement of the journal

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests