Reviewer’s report

Title: The most effective strategy for recruiting a pregnancy cohort: A tale of two cities

Version: 1 Date: 29 January 2013

Reviewer: G Webster

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Overall comments:
This is a well-written description and evaluation of the extensive recruitment techniques used to enroll pregnant women who were <27 weeks gestation into the Alberta-based APrON study. The paper is an important addition to the literature and will be useful to other physicians and researchers wishing to enroll pregnant women into prospective research studies. I recommend that the paper be published in BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth after the following minor revisions have been made.

Major Compulsory Revisions: None

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) Please add a short description of the overall goals of the APrON study, as well as the study protocol outlined in Figure 1. As stated in the paper, different aspects of the protocol (e.g. non-essential blood collections, whether participants will have access to personal results, etc) will influence participants’ willingness to participate in the study. At the moment, these details are not immediate clear to the reader.

2) Please add a caption for Figure 1.

3) Methods, Recruitment strategies section: Please add a sentence explaining whether midwifery clinics were also targeted as another clinical setting in which to enroll women in early pregnancy (and see comment 7 below).

4) Please describe the social media aspects of the recruitment campaign in more detail. This is a relatively new method of participant recruitment, and other researchers / ethics board members would benefit from hearing about your experience. Did your ethics board have any concerns about patient confidentiality using social media recruitment methods?

5) Methods, 2nd paragraph: How was the <27 week gestational age (GA) at enrollment defined (e.g. ultrasound dating, last menstrual period, etc)?

6) Methods, Media section (and elsewhere). Please add links (or a supplementary file) to your posters, press release, TV ad for Access Network, and when possible, to examples of some of the “earned media” used to promote the study. These examples would help other researchers undertaking similar recruitment campaigns. Another sentence about how you promoted the study to
capture attention from “earned media” would also be helpful.

7) Methods, section 6: Other. You state that study staff contacted the Doula Association, naturopath clinics, midwives, etc. Was there much uptake / interest from these groups? If not, what may have been the barriers to recruitment in these settings?

8) Methods, section 6: Other, 2nd paragraph. Please revise the 1st two sentences in this paragraph. The current explanation is not clear. Who are the community supporters? Was the monthly draw run by the Apron Study? Were the coupons and brochures from the APrON study?

9) Discussion, 6th paragraph: your wording implies that approximately 45% of the Calgary and Edmonton populations (aged 25-34 yrs) have less than high school education. Is this true, or is the wording misleading? Lower down in the same paragraph you state that 18% and 22% of people in Calgary & Edmonton do not have certificates of diplomas. Please clarify this section.

10) Table 1: Clarify in footnote if women were only allowed to report 1 recruitment method. The text suggests that women had often heard about the study several times before being officially recruited into the study.

11) Table 1: Change % values to 1 decimal (not 2)

12) Table 1: In “Other for Calgary section”, add % calculations.

13) Table 1: In “Other for Calgary section”, define PSA. Some people may not be familiar with this acronym.

14) Table 3: Please add comparison data for the background target population, where possible. Then discuss potential volunteer bias in your recruited population, if relevant. If present, this recruitment bias will affect the external validity of the study, and needs to be discussed as a limitation.

Discretionary Revisions:

1) Background, last paragraph: Consider changing wording to “women with obstetrician-attended births”, rather than “women delivered by obstetricians.”

2) Discussion, 6th paragraph, 3rd last sentence: suggest removing the phrase “and pregnant women who participate in research studies appear to be of higher SES”. This point has been made above.

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:
No competing interests.