Reviewer's report

Title: Effectiveness of mobile-phone short message service (SMS) reminders for ophthalmology outpatient appointments: observational study

Version: 1 Date: 25 March 2008

Reviewer: Richard D Neal

Reviewer's report:

This is an original and interesting study. The paper is well-written. I have a few suggestions for improving the paper.

Major compulsory revisions

The authors need to tone down some of their conclusions – e.g. 1st paragraph of the discussion they state that ‘sending SMS reminders led to…’ This is incorrect given the design (as they acknowledge elsewhere). The group having SMS reminders had fewer missed appointments, but the effect cannot be regarded as causal. More of this point needs to be made in the discussion.

There is no mention of patient demographics or clinical details between the two groups. This seems to be a major omission. There is a huge age difference in mobile ownership and use and this needs to be reported (indeed it may account for the main finding). The clinical reasons for the appointment will also affect the ‘value’ to it given by patients and affect the likelihood of the appointment being kept.

Minor essential revisions

Some discussion on the ‘transient’ and dynamic ways in which technology is used and how useful this study will be in the future would be welcome. If the study were repeated again next year, would the effects be the same?

Cost-effectiveness. This is tricky. There is always some wastage in a system and the real cost (if any) of a missed appointment is somewhat difficult to estimate. Indeed, if the appointments that are missed are those that aren’t really needed (difficult to prove, I know) then this is a wholly ineffective intervention. Some discussion please?

Is the next step an RCT stratified by sociodemographics and clinical conditions?

Discretionary revisions

None

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'