Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 26 March 2008

Reviewer: William Hamilton

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions
None

- Minor Essential Revisions

The authors make it clear in their final sentence of the paper and the abstract how they view this study. It’s preliminary and more work is agreed. That’s correct. This is a good initial study – with considerable promise for the future, but I think this status as a feasibility study needs more emphasis.

As it stands, this paper is publishable, with a few amendments. The authors need to acknowledge a bit more that their design was suboptimal (it would have been possible to perform a RCT on those with mobile phone numbers, though of course they didn’t know the anticipated effect size; with their 11% v 18% only 558 were needed in each group). They mention that age and sex could not be determined – why? That said, it is probable that the young preferentially were texted and they generally have a higher DNA rate. The authors should move the economic section – at least in part – to the results, and I’d love to see a NNT (number needed to text!) which will be ~ 15). Some more clarity is needed in the methods on whether this was new appointments or FUs – it looks like new – at least for the intervention group. If so, a comparison with new patients would be wiser. In some specialties the new DNA rate is lower than the FU rate. The references are a bit dated, and I’m surprised Debbie Sharp and my editorial in the BMJ is omitted (this isn’t a request for a citation, promise!). I couldn’t see an ethics committee mention either.

- Discretionary Revisions

None – though I suppose the BMJ editorial mention should be in this category…

Quality of written English - excellent

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

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' William Hamilton