Reviewer’s report

Title: Keeping participants on board: increasing uptake by automated respondent reminders in an Internet-based Chlamydia Screening in the Netherlands

Version: 1 Date: 25 November 2011

Reviewer: Jessica Sheringham

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for inviting me to review this paper. The authors are addressing an important question – modelling suggests that if chlamydia screening programmes do not achieve sufficient coverage or uptake they will not be able to control chlamydia prevalence. And existing programmes (eg in England) have found this level of coverage challenging to achieve. The research question is clearly justified in the introduction and in the background to the abstract.

Methods & results

1. The methods used for the design and procedure of the CSI were clearly described in the body of the test and in paragraph 3 of the introduction. However, at times (eg in the abstract) I was confused by the study design and outcome measures studied. This is partly because this is a complex intervention, but also because terms used to describe package request is also referred to as response rate and these terms are used interchangeably. I would find it clearer if after defining initially, just one term was used throughout. The same applies to sample return (referred to initially as participation rate).

2. Given that the content of invitation messages can have a significant impact of uptake of public health campaigns, I think it would be really useful to describe what was in the texts and reminder letters. This might also have affected which young people chose to respond.

3. In the data analysis, I think it would have been useful to analyse determinants of sample return and package request separately by gender. The authors describe gender differences in other studies and noted that in general we know less about why/which men participate in these programmes. This study has the potential to provide useful information on this.

4. I understand that sample return rates by socio-demographic and risk characteristics have been reported in other similar publications on CSI, but I needed to know what the response to the initial invitation was also.

5. I was at times confused in the reporting of results. I think all odds ratios should be reported with confidence intervals. However, to minimise confusion, the authors could consider reporting for just for one round of screening, then reporting differences between the rounds of screening after.

Discussion and conclusions

6. My main concern with the discussion and overall conclusions is that although
SMS and email did increase sample return rates, they did not increase these rates to levels that modelling suggests are required for screening to control chlamydia prevalence. I think the message that email/SMS does not resolve the significant challenges faced by chlamydia screening programmes in achieving sufficient uptake of screening is important.

7. I think this study may have relevance beyond CT screening, the authors may wish to think about lessons that are more generalizable to other public health programmes where people are invited by post, given that SMS and email are more widely used amongst the population as a whole.

8. The authors acknowledge the limitations of the study appropriately, eg that increase in package request/sample return cannot be conclusively attributed to the email/SMS. In the results, it would be helpful to rephrase the text to reflect this limitation eg on P8 paragraph 3, ‘the reminder emails/SMS seem to have slightly increased the sample return’ which do imply that these communications were responsible for sample return.

9. The authors discuss the association between providing a cell phone number and the risk factors for CT positivity. I would have found it helpful to have further discussion of the theoretical basis for examining determinants of giving cell phone numbers, perhaps at the start of the paper in order to understand the public health relevance of this finding.

Summary of revisions described above

Minor essential
- Correct minor typographical eg p3 2nd para …communication technologies SUCH as…, p7 para 1 cell pHone, p10 1st para – bracket missing errors
- Clarification of terminology (point 1)
- Quote odds ratios with confidence intervals (5)
- Clarify language re. attribution of effects (8)

Discretionary
- Conduct analysis of determinants of sample return and package request by gender (3)
- Consider in the discussion the relevance of email/SMS reminders beyond CT screening (7)
- provide justification for examining provision of cell no (9)

Major compulsory
- Revise the conclusions to reflect the sample return rates required for CT control and those achieved by addition of email/SMS reminders (6)

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
**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.