Reviewer's report

Title: Comparison of group counseling with individual counseling in the comprehension of informed consent: a randomized controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 16 November 2009

Reviewer: Holly Taylor

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article but fails on a number of important points. First, no literature that supports the team's hypothesis that a group counseling session may be better than a one-on-one conversation regarding subject/patient understanding is provided. I could argue that the group process may be worse as individuals may be embarrassed to ask questions in front of others, etc.. It is also not clear that the trial was controlled in any way to not come to the exact result that they found. That is, there is no discussion of what if anything was discussed in the groups that may have fostered understanding, nor any discussion of what was not said in the individual sessions. Unless the individual obtaining consent from the individual refused to engage in discussion, there is little of substance to compare across the two groups of subjects (and the latter would also be unethical so I understand why they wouldn't do this but it would certainly get in the way of getting a reliable answer to their research question OR they could have assessed their understanding before the discussion and after, etc.. What the results of this study seem to show is that neither approach is very good at providing information that the subject will be asked to retain for 48-72 hours. We know for example, that understanding is best assessed right after the information about which the individual will be quizzed. It is not a surprise that few retained the information, nor that particular aspects of the information shared was less likely to be retained (i.e. this is not a contribution to the literature) There is also a concern with the statistical analysis conducted. I am not an expert in statistical analysis but I imagine there are statistical ways in which the fact that some learned in groups and others on their own has an effect on how they should be 'counted' in the analysis. that is, is a group counted as 1 or as 8 if there were eight participants. If the latter then there is no presentation of any adjustment made for the role of the group process.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.