Reviewer's report

Title: Physicians Perceptions of an Electronic Health Record-based Clinical Trial Alert Approach to Subject Recruitment: A Survey

Version: 2 Date: 1 November 2007

Reviewer: Mark1 Weiner

Reviewer's report:

General
THhis is an important manuscript that captures some of the subjective issues that influence the use of alerts toward recruitment into clinical trials. Its strength is its relation to an actual implementation rather than a hypothetical exploration. It also asked questions that addressed the frequency of acceptance of CTA responses, and provides some insight into the relationship between survey responses with actual performance with respect to the recruitment alerts.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Ownership of the study may play a role in the interest in using the CTA. The following questions address the ownership issue and the possible influence on the results of the study
1a. One important descriptive piece of information is the number of the 10 endocrinologists who were investigators on the diabetes study, or if relevant, the number of internists.
1b. Related to this is the phrasing of question 13 of the survey "is this a technology that you would like to use for **your** future trials" (emphasis added). How many of the physicians, especially the internists are really engaged in the research process to the point where they could claim ownership of a trial, as opposed to helping colleagues or advancing science more generally?
1c. Page 9 says that "88% of respondents who conduct clinical trials would like to use CTAs for their trials." How did you know what the denominator was? If you do know who actually is personally engaged in clinical research then that should be an important stratification in reporting results since those engaged in research may be more invested in the process of recruitment in general.

2. The univariate descriptions of the variables are interesting, but raise even more important questions that may be answered by bivariate analysis. The large percent of people citing time as a reason to dismiss the CTA needs to be better reconciled with people who wanted more information which clearly would involve more time. In particular the answers to the following questions would be helpful:
2a. How mutually exclusive were the groups of people noting time as a negative
factor with the group who seemed to want more information?

2b. Were the people citing time as a negative factor as influenced by the potential for more specific alerts that may be perceived as time saving?

As a matter of generalizability, the issue of time is extremely important since providers whose primary concern about the alerts relates to time may be markedly resistant to using the tools, even if other design features were improved. Some institutions may have a lot more of these "time sensitive" providers than others.

3. As a matter of internal reliability, it appears that the authors know who really did respond to the CTA and who did not. It would be useful to have a statement confirming that the responses to question 3 were truthful based on your knowledge of actual behavior.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

none

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

none

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests