Reviewer's report

Title: The requirement for prior consent to participate on survey response rates: a population-based survey in Grampian

Version: 2 Date: 19 September 2003

Reviewer: Marie Pirotta

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper presents the results of a study of great topical interest, at least in the UK and Australia, where new privacy laws are having considerable impact on the conduct of public health and primary care research.

The research aims are clearly elucidated and the methods appropriate and well described. All the surveys are accounted for and figure 3 is helpful in following the flow of data in the study.

Overall the discussion and conclusions are sound, but in my opinion the major point to be emphasised is the problem of bias in the sample obtained, with the cost and complexity due to the extra step imposed is a secondary issue.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
Abstract

1. The background should be about the new confidentiality legislation and that this may have an impact on survey response rates.

2. Conclusion: the word BIAS should appear.

Background
1. Para 1: Surveys have been used with significant success … needs references
2. Para 2: These sampling frames have been used … with success. Quote response rates obtained here.
3. The section under “The Study Context” should mostly be included in methods.

Methods
1. The procedure for following–up non-responders should be described in the main methods section, not under statistical methods.

Results
1. The word ‘outwith’ appears twice. I am not familiar with it. Should it read ‘outside’?

Discussion
1. I would recommend making the first and major point about the problem of bias in the samples and the cost and complexity a secondary issue.

Minor Compulsory Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Figure 1 does not show that the sample population reflects the Grampian population as stated in the text. This information should be presented for the reader.

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

None

**Advice on publication:** Accept after minor compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None