Reviewer's report

Title: A centralised public information resource for randomised trials: a scoping study to explore desirability and feasibility

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2005

Reviewer: Kristina Staley

Reviewer's report:

General

This study has started to explore what information potential participants would want on a centralised public information resource to be able to judge the quality of clinical trials before deciding to join. At a time when there is much renewed interest in establishing universal trial registers, these findings will be invaluable to people aiming to make such registers accessible to the general public.

Thus far much of the research around participation in clinical trials has examined the factors that influence people’s decision to take part in a trial with a view to developing strategies to overcome the barriers. There has also been considerable interest in assessing whether participants understand the process of randomisation, and how best to explain this process to them. This study is one of the first to ask people what they want to know, rather than what they don’t understand. It has shown that potential participants place much more emphasis on knowing why a trial is necessary and who will really benefit than on knowing how trials work.

There may be some concerns about whether the methods used in this study fully comply with those used in purely academic research. However, it is important to remember that this is only a scoping study, and that the authors acknowledge that there is considerably more research to be done. I recommend that this paper is published because of its relevance and significance to the development of new clinical trial registers. If these registers are going to be accessible to the public in a way that effectively supports their involvement, then the registers will need to be developed in a way that respects people’s intelligence and autonomy. This study makes a vital contribution to the discussion as to how this is best achieved.

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

None.

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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)

Table 1 is missing from the PDF file.

I found Figure 1 a bit confusing - I think it would benefit from a different layout so that there is more space around different ‘arms’. I also wondered if the top box shouldn’t be ‘information about trials’ rather than ‘information about trial progress’.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The paper mentions that potential participants asked for contact details. I would be interested to know if they were asking for contact details of individuals linked to specific trials who could provide information about each trial or contact details of a source of independent advice about participation in trials in general.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.