Reviewer's report

Title: Effect on survey response rate of hand written versus printed signature on a covering letter: randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 15 April 2005

Reviewer: Roger Harrison

Reviewer's report:

General

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

The paper would have more interest if there was further discussion about factors influencing response rates in general, rather than just referencing one systematic review. Trials have since been published, not included in that review (such as Harrison RA, Holt D & Elton PJ, and Harrison & Cock). It would be helpful to include some evidence of the extent that nonresponders might differ to responders, as found in other studies and if this is consistent across all situations - are clinicians different for example?

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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)

Page 4 - only one reference to the Edwards review is needed, not two.

The results in the Edwards review do not show "modest" effect - an odds of 1.16 is near enough no effect.

Page 6 - please clarify what postage paid means. Was it a stamped addressed envelope or a business franked envelope and what colour were the envelopes?

It would be helpful to know if the intervention had any effect on initial response rates prior to sending out reminder letters. i.e. did it reduce the number of reminder letters needed?

Figre 1. Please add percentages % (x/y). Also report the final OR and 95% CI here.

The method for statistical analysis, whilst simple here, needs to be reported.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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 below