Reviewer’s report

Title: Factors influencing the participation of gastroenterologists and hepatologists in clinical research

Version: 2 Date: 7 August 2008

Reviewer: Merran Toerien

Reviewer’s report:

I would like to thank the authors for responding to my comments on their paper. Most of my concerns have been adequately addressed. However, there remain some minor essential revisions. The numbering below corresponds to the numbering used in the authors’ covering letter:

1. The authors have, appropriately, added a statement about why they compared gastroenterologists and hepatologists. However, I was also hoping that they would provide some explanation for choosing this field of medicine rather than another as a focus for their study. I think that they allude to a reason on p. 11 (Discussion): “given the paucity of related research in other specialties and the limitations of existing studies, definitive conclusions about barriers to clinical trial participation across specialties are difficult to make”. It would be helpful if the authors could add a sentence to the introduction or the methods section stating something along these lines – i.e. that although there is prior research on reasons for trial participation, but this has been limited with regard to range of specialities – hence this study.

6. Limitations. The sentence in which the authors have addressed my point is worded confusingly:

“We targeted members of the AASLD under the assumption that most gastroenterologists and hepatologists with an interest in clinical research likely would be associated with the organization. To the extent that this assumption may be incorrect, our findings may not be representative of all gastroenterologists and hepatologists eligible to conduct clinical research in the United States, particularly those who may perceive high barriers to participation in such activities” (p.13).

It is true to say that if their assumption is incorrect they may have a sample which is not representative of those eligible to conduct clinical research in the US. However, the latter point – that they may have missed those physicians who are less likely to take part in research – is a problem if their assumption is correct (!) because they are, potentially, tapping those physicians most likely to be research active. These sources of bias should be discussed separately, not in a single sentence.

7. Figures. Unfortunately, I no longer have a copy of the original set of tables
included by the authors. However, it seems to me that their decision to remove some of them was detrimental to the paper, rather than an improvement. In particular, I felt that there should at least be a table showing barriers to participation (i.e. a mirror of the current Table 3 – factors influencing participation in clinical trials). I also felt that the authors’ removal of the subheadings in the results section made it less clear, rather than more so.

8. I thought the Discussion was much improved. However, I would ask the authors to add a sentence or two clarifying what they mean by “their responses may reflect the realities of conducting research in the current climate” (p.12). Also, with respect to the final paragraph on p.12 (“Another possible explanation…”): could the authors clarify whether their claims here about exposure are based on their personal knowledge of the field or if there is any published evidence supporting the contrast they describe.

Minor typo

p.12.

“In the United States, reimbursement for many medical procedures has been relatively higher—on an hourly basis—than for evaluation and management services [16,17], thought that gap has been reduced by changes in the Medicare fee schedule over time [18]”. “thought that gap” should be “though that gap”.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.