Reviewer’s report

Title: Pay clinicians to join clinical trials? A review of guidelines and survey of trialists

Version: 2 Date: 7 August 2008

Reviewer: Rebecca Smyth

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) Title -
‘survey of trialists’ I was expecting a questionnaire based study. Perhaps you may want to consider the term ‘qualitative / interview’ in their title?

2) Background –
A definition of ‘financial incentives’ would be helpful. I was unclear as to what these included.

3) Methods
More detail regarding methods used would be helpful in order for the work to be replicated. For example:
a) List of the bibliographic databases, websites and UK agencies searched (with dates).
b) How agencies were surveyed? What this involved?
c) 44 interviews were performed, however I make it 42 (38+4 (2/3 of inactive researchers identified through snowball sampling refused), please check.
d) Some text relating to interview schedule would be helpful. This would give the reader some appreciation of the questions asked and the topics covered.
e) Methods used to analyse qualitative data is required.
f) CH was responsible for analysing the data – who is CH (not listed as an author)?
g) Sampling - on what basis were the pre-specified dimensions considered to be important, what is their possible influence?

5) Results:
a) Would be helpful to know how many UK agencies were contacted. Are those agencies that responded a representative sample? (how many did not respond etc)
b) Data only reported for those agencies that do not mention payment and the GMC. Is this because others did not respond? Or do you have more data to present?
c) How many interviewees fell into the pre-specified sampling frame?

d) The third aim (financial incentives in relation to barriers and facilitators to healthcare professionals) no data (quotes) are presented regarding this aim. Nor are there any related to the pre-specified dimensions, especially regarding surgery etc

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

4) Background:

a) Not stated at outset why failing to meet recruitment targets is a problem. You may want to consider including some text relating to why it is so important for trials to meet their recruitment targets for example; underpowered trials are unable to detect important clinical differences / outcomes, trials not recruiting will take longer to complete therefore becoming more expensive to run and ultimately importance evidence may be delayed etc.

b) Reading the second aim “explore attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of healthcare professionals” I was surprised to read it was lead investigators (either clinicians or non-clinicians) that were interviewed. Would be helpful to clarify (in objectives) who were interviewed.

5) Results:

a) How many interviewees fell into the pre-specified sampling frame?

b) General comment – headings may help i.e. to meet objectives b and c.

c) Consider including a table presenting characteristics of those interviewed (and perhaps comparing with those that declined to be interviewed)

d) Last quote re probity test is difficult to follow – perhaps a larger proportion of the transcript needs to be presented.

e) I would find it useful if the qualitative data were presented by identified themes.

f) Also if more quotes were presented, in order to provide examples of the data obtained. Presenting quotes relating to just positive and negative effects and probity test didn’t seem adequate. For example the affect on altruism, interviewees also suggested principles suggested (good study design, payments to organisations rather than individuals etc), I would have liked to see the qualitative data to support these themes.

I found your manuscript interesting to read and hope my suggestions are helpful.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

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