Reviewer's report

Title: Decisions about participation in RCTs: The role of conditional altruism

Version: 2 Date: 24 June 2009

Reviewer: Susan Bull

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions
  None

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the methods section it would be useful to have some idea of the contents of the topic guided schedule; for the interviews and an idea about whether these topics changed over time as data was collected and analysed. If word limits are a consideration the paragraph beginning In centre A, SM attended could perhaps be deleted.

2. I realize this paper is going into a primarily quantitative journal; but nonetheless in the results section some topics have been selected for discussion; it would be useful to include some context or indication of the richness of the data as well. For example, under (a) initial inclination to participate; what proportion of people (a few, some, most?) indicated an inclination to help others. What other factors contributed to / acted against the initial inclination? Under (b) potential to benefit personally and (c) personal concerns; can there be some indication of how frequently people mentioned these potentials. Where there any unusual factors only reported by a few people?

3. In the results section; the paragraph ending Indeed several quite clearly confirmed to clinicians that they had no preference or were undecided; it would be useful to know if these were also the ones who expressed the interest in receiving surgery during the interviews.

4. With figure 1; please clarify if this just refers to people entering the randomization arm of the trial (rather than choosing a treatment arm).

- Discretionary Revisions

5. In the results section; the two quotes from people hoping to be allocated to surgical treatment don't seem to add much to each other; perhaps just one could be used.

6. The discussion seems to move from what motivations are to communication requirements given motivations to participate. In the discussion it might be worth making more explicit the argument that I think is underlying your comments; i.e. for consent to be valid, people need info about (and arguably
understanding of) topics of most importance to their decisions.
Risks and benefits are important to decision-making therefore need to think how best to explain them (and have two-way consent processes so can identify participants\cite{8217}; misunderstandings and address them).

7. In figure 1 the final two boxes may be best combined as a single box entitled \cite{8216}; decision whether or not to participate in the (randomisation arm/ any arm of the reflux trial)\cite{8217}; and the between arrows of the two boxes above it (both beginning initial inclination \cite{8230};) could be deleted.

What next?
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Given your assessment of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?
- Accept after minor essential revisions (which the authors can be trusted to make)

Level of interest
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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:
- An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
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- Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests
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Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:
I declare that I have no competing interests