Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 16 July 2009

Reviewer: Jenny L Donovan

Reviewer's report:

This is a very nicely written paper. It addresses an important question underlying why patients take part in RCTs. The finding is original and a contribution to the literature in adding a degree of subtlety to the often described finding that participants are motivated by altruism. This paper finds that altruism is important, but adds that it is not the only motivation for participation as some element of perceived personal benefit is also involved.

The methods of the study are described thoroughly and the data are presented well. The title and abstract are suitable

- Major Compulsory Revisions

None

- Minor Essential Revisions

The authors should:

1. Improve the rather clumsy sentence in the abstract: “Enactment of the tendency to … themselves”.

2. Provide a reference to support the qualitative research methods used. The description of the data analysis on page 7 is adequate although “&” should be replaced by text, and a reference to the method should be provided.

3. Within the discussion, provide a short section on the possible limitations of the current research.

- Discretionary Revisions

The authors might like to consider the following minor points that might improve the manuscript:

1. On page 5, the issue of limiting the patient preference group is mentioned. This could be reflected on in the discussion in terms of the effect this might have had on the sample interviewed and observed. It is not clear why this quota was applied.

2. On page 8, before the section (a) initial inclination to participate, it would be helpful to the reader to have a short paragraph explaining how the data moved from analysis to these themes, and an overview of how the themes were derived and organized.

3. The discussion includes several interesting and important issues. The authors
might like to consider the recently published paper by Wade et al (It’s not just
what you say, it’s also how you say it: Opening the ‘black box’ of informed
consent appointments in randomized controlled trials. Social Science and
Medicine 2009, 68, 11, 2018-2028) which addresses some similar issues.

What next?
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- Accept after discretionary revisions (which the authors can choose to ignore)
- Accept after minor essential revisions (which the authors can be trusted to
  make)

**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:**

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None