Reviewer’s report

Title: The UK Clinical Research Network - has it been a success for dermatology clinical trials?

Version: 1 Date: 13 April 2011

Reviewer: Haleema Shakur

Reviewer’s report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   The UK Clinical Research Network has substantial UK public funding and whether it is fulfilling its objectives has to be scrutinized. The question as to whether it is contributing to the success of dermatology trials is therefore very important.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
   The presentation of the two case studies to illustrate the success of the UK Clinical Research Network is confusing. From this report it is not clear what exactly the responsibility of the UK Clinical Research Network is. From the case studies given, it could be interpreted that the Network stepped in because there was no clear Trial Management Plan (to cover maternity leave and provide staff when there was a deluge of interest in the trial) or a sound Recruitment Strategy at the start of either of the trials (there is only description of what was planned once recruitment was assessed failing) - factors which should routinely be considered when managing a clinical trial.

   The presentation of the recruitment data to illustrate UK Clinical Research Network success might be misleading. Using the media to bring the trial to the attention of the target population was probably the most important factor in improving recruitment – which was the investigator initiative. The additional staff to support the Trial Manager when there was a deluge of interest could have been provided by any agency providing temporary staff or was there any special expertise which the Network offered which could not be offered by any other?

3. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The conclusion needs to focus more on what the Network contributed to the success or otherwise of the trials. The Network had no input into bringing the awareness of the trial to the public or did they? It also mentioned the ‘availability of experienced and extremely dedicated research teams who constantly strove to ensure that the trials were of high quality and delivered to target’. I have a vision of the Network having a group of expert people sitting around waiting for a call for help. More information on how the Network is organised to be able to provide such expert support should be given in this report.
It might be more useful to use the case studies to illustrate how support was accessed as many investigators might find that information more useful. Also, highlight the objectives of the Network and use the case studies to illustrate how the Network achieved their objectives and together were able to deliver the two trials.

**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