Reviewer's report

Title: Registration of non-commercial randomised clinical trials: the feasibility of using registration data to monitor trends in the number of trials

Version: 3 Date: 13 June 2012

Reviewer: Andrew Vickers

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This is a straightforward paper than plots the number of trials over time, derived from two clinical trial registers.

Attention to the following details would improve the paper

1) There are a number of errors in the tables which should be corrected, such as reported 100.0% (the .0 being pointless here) or 9605 instead, presumably of 96.5%. Please check all numbers carefully.

2) The tables are difficult to read because they have too many numbers. It is unclear why each and every year has to be reported in place of categories (e.g. 1990 – 94, 95 – 99 etc. etc.)

3) The number of registered trials in 2000 and 2001 looks 4 or 5 fold higher than those estimated by Chalmers. Please justify the statement that the number of trials estimated in this study was similar to those estimated by Chalmers.

4) Figure 2 is very poorly presented. The x axis is very messy and the lines are not clear. Which line corresponds to MRC, NHS and other? What do the double headed arrows refer to?

5) Some discussion about the interpretation of the number of trials would be important. For example, it strikes me that fewer trials isn’t necessarily a bad thing, on the grounds that I’d prefer one good trial to multiple second rate trials.