Reviewer's report

Title: A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of using personal tailored risk information and taster sessions to increase the uptake of smoking cessation services

Version: 1 Date: 14 September 2012

Reviewer: Jamie Ostroff

Reviewer's report:

Despite the widespread availability of smoking cessation services, uptake remains suboptimal. The investigators are addressing a clinical important and yet under-studied research question—namely, what are effective strategies for improving recruitment of smokers into smoking cessation treatment services? Generally speaking, the methods are well-described and justified. Methodological strengths include the practical nature of the treatment outreach/recruitment strategies being tested, the large sample size, the clinical capacity of the NHS SSS, novelty of offering introductory sessions, objective validation of NHS SSS session attendance, efforts taken to minimize study condition contamination, efforts to estimate the external validity of the findings by comparing enrollees and non-enrollees and use of intent to treat analyses. The findings are likely to have implications for clinical practice as well as research efforts to improve reach of smoking cessation treatment services.

MAJOR COMULSORY REVISIONS

As currently planned, the experimental condition includes both a personal tailored risk communication letter AND an invitation to attend a “taster” session. Please provide a rationale for not offering the “taster” session to the control group? That would have allowed for the investigators to isolate the effect of these two promising cessation treatment recruitment approaches. (Major compulsory revision)

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

The title would benefit from rewording to achieve greater specificity and clarity regarding the intervention condition. See recommended changes in the paper title. “A randomized trial to evaluate the effectiveness of using a personalized letter with tailored risk information and invitation to attend an introductory session taster sessions to increase the uptake of smoking cessation services.” (Minor essential revision)

For greater clarity, I suggest rewording of “taster” session to either “tester” session or “introductory” session or “sample” session. At least from an American English language perspective, the term “taster” invokes more common reference to snacks or a buffet table!
Further discussion is also warranted regarding the selection of the control group. Did the investigators consider comparison with "usual care"? Presumably GPs provide personalized quitting advice and refer smokers to the NHS SSS. What is routinely done with smokers seen at these practices? What is the typical uptake for this approach? (minor essential revision)

What is the rationale for inclusion of only those smokers “motivated to quit”. Presumably this intervention might have an even stronger effect among individuals with less quitting readiness or less motivation to quit. What are the implications of restricting the sample to those motivated to quit? Please add to Discussion. (Minor essential revision)

P 8. I question the statement that “smokers from the more disadvantaged areas are more INTERESTED in receiving help than smokers from areas of low deprivation. Please provide further justification or reword this statement to reflect greater need.

P 24 The estimated response rate (7%) seems very low if the sample is restricted to those motivated to quit. Please explain.

It is recommended that a sample of the generic letter also be included as supplemental material.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

P 3 Delete “prompt more quit attempts” from Discussion as it appears to go beyond the scope of the intervention strategy. (Discretionary revision)

Do you plan to stratify the results reporting by occupation or socioeconomic level?

Several minor wording suggestions:
P 7, … in the UK manual labor …. 
P 7, … as part of this strategy, the delivery of cessation …
P 8, … include those who express a longer period of intent to quit. Please review this sentence and possibly reword
P 9, … the relative effectiveness of two invitation outreach (or recruitment) methods…
P 10, … Ultimately, this study aims to …
P 10, … help change their smoking behavior…
P 11, … A Freepost stamped, self-addressed envelop….
P 12 and p 16, … standard generic letter from the surgery (do you mean GP practice?).
P 20, … three to coincide with the process visits (please clarify the purpose of these visits)
P 20, … Please review and reword description of baseline measures. This
citation for the baseline measurement of quitting readiness does not appear to be correct.

P 27 Consider exploratory analysis of whether findings differ by motivation to quit.

P 29 What minor revisions were made following completion of the pilot phase?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I DECLARE THAT I HAVE NO COMPETING INTERESTS