Reviewer's report

Title: The value of the PRECIS wheel in an ongoing study: the BLISTER trial

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Reviewer: Shaun Treweek

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General

It was very interesting reading this paper on the application of PRECIS in an ongoing trial, which helps to build up information on the applicability of the tool in trial design. The recommendation to include PRECIS wheels in trial protocols or trials is an excellent idea but not just for the benefit of researchers; clinicians and patients may also be interested. Some specific comments are given below, most important first and then by section heading.

Major compulsory revisions

There is no quantitative information presented, a particular problem in Results because it makes it hard for readers to know whether some of the authors’ statements are correct. It would also be useful to know how big, physically, the PRECIS tool sent to the six members of the BLISTER team was e.g. 4cm, 6cm spokes on the PRECIS wheel and there is no mention of a scale 0-4 or 0-10. The original PRECIS article by Thorpe et al does not provide a scoring system but it sounds as though the authors of the current paper have used one; it would be good to know what it was.

So, for example, the authors say ‘there was a relatively narrow range of scores’ but it’s hard to know how true this is without a table providing numerical information on individual scores. Looking at Figure 1 does suggest that agreement was not as good as the statement suggests, something also true of the statement ‘the results were quite consistent’. The PRECIS spoke for eligibility criteria looks like there was a lot of disagreement within the group, similarly for participant compliance. I think highlighting and making explicit these differences in trial teams is one of the strengths of the PRECIS tool so I don’t see it as a particular problem but some of the authors’ statements do suggest a greater level of consensus than the figure seems to show and, additionally, some numerical data are essential for readers to come to their own conclusions.

Minor essential revisions

Abstract

Page 2. As mentioned above, some of the statements should be revisited, eg. ‘A relatively narrow range of scores were obtained on most of the ten domains of the PRECIS wheel showing evidence of a consensus among the team.’ I think the words ‘readily be’ should be dropped as using PRECIS can be tricky (and I
say this as someone who was part of its development) and the authors highlight their own difficulties. Also “in such a way” is redundant.

Introduction

1. Page 3, 2nd paragraph. It would be helpful to the reader to list the ten characteristics of a trial that PRECIS considers.

2. There are two additional recent references using PRECIS that the authors may wish to look at and, if they feel it appropriate, reference:


The BLISTER Trial

Page 5, Second paragraph. Re. inadequate reporting. It would be good to refer to the 2010 CONSORT Statement here, perhaps together with the CONSORT extension for pragmatic trials (Zwarenstein M, Trewick S, Gagnier JJ, Altman DG, Tunis S, Haynes B, Oxman AD, Moher D. Improving the reporting of pragmatic trials: an extension of the CONSORT statement. BMJ 2008;337:a2390). A bit of text along the lines of ‘..despite reporting standards such as CONSORT, there may be inadequate reporting..' The authors are quite correct that inadequate reporting is a problem for retrospective completion of PRECIS. Tosh and colleagues (see reference above) mention inadequate reporting and used “0” to score a domain with no information. That’s one way of dealing with the problem and it would be worth mentioning.

Method

It would be useful to provide a blank PRECIS wheel to give readers an idea of what it looks like and what the authors used to score the trial. I don’t think it would be difficult to get permission to do this.

Benefits and Drawbacks of PRECIS

Page 6. Please specify the ‘more methodological domains’ that some of the clinicians found tricky.

Recommendations

Page 7, second paragraph, 3rd line. Spelling error – help researchERS not researches.

References

The following reference has now been published (it’s given as in press, which no
doubt it was at submission).


**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