Reviewer’s report

Title: Lesson learned from the conduct of a multisite cluster-randomized practical trial of decision aids in rural and suburban primary cares practices

Version: 1 Date: 10 June 2013

Reviewer: Ann Dadich

Reviewer’s report:

Given the exponential rise in healthcare research, which is juxtaposed by the declining availability of research funding, this manuscript makes a notable contribution to extant research in (at least) four key ways. First, it offers practical, evidence-based lessons that can be used to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of future research. It can help others to avoid similar pitfalls and make efficient use of their limited resources (which includes time). Related to this, these lessons can help to avert research-fatigue among well-intentioned practitioners and patients. It can also ensure the voices that are seldom reflected in healthcare research (for instance, those who do not opt-in) are represented; this in turn can enhance the theoretical relevance of research. Third, the lessons presented in this manuscript can help funding bodies to understand and appreciate the inherent difficulties of healthcare research and their impact on: (1) the robustness of research findings; and (2) the potential value of healthcare policy informed by these findings. Fourth, the manuscript reveals the dark-side associated with conventional approaches to research – like the opt-in approach. Seldom are the ill-effects associated with these approaches reported in the literature, perhaps in part because of limited resources to explore and report on these. Given these contributions, this manuscript is both timely and informative – I would like to thank the authors for sharing these useful lessons.

In accordance with the journal guidelines, responses to the seven suggested items are presented as follows

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The authors report ‘some lessons... drawn’ from a multi-center, pragmatic RCT – as such, the scope of the manuscript is well-defined.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

As a descriptive account of lessons garnered from a multi-center, pragmatic RCT, the portrayal of the research process and the data analyses to demonstrate the effects of methodological decisions are appropriate.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

The tabulated data offer detail that can be readily grasped by readers to better
understand the effects of methodological decisions throughout the study.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

As a narrative account of lessons garnered from a multi-center, pragmatic RCT, the manuscript adheres to relevant standards.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The authors are to be commended for distilling the complexity of the study into kernels of useful insights for the benefit of others. These insights are summarized in the Discussion and Conclusion sections, and are supported by the data.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title and abstract accurately convey the key messages of the manuscript.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

Notwithstanding a couple of areas that could be revised to enhance the flow of the text, the manuscript is clear, eloquent, and logical.

Discretionary Revisions

For the authors’ consideration, the areas that could be revised include:

• References to ‘invite and consent patients’ – this might be rephrased as, ‘invite consenting patients’
• ‘Although similar’ – this might be rephrased as ‘Although a similar’
• Figure 2, as labels along the y axis are partially obscured

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.