Reviewer's report

Title: Reflecting on the methodological challenges of recruiting to a UK-wide multi-centre randomised controlled trial.

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Reviewer: Usha Menon

Reviewer's report:

The authors report on the challenges of recruiting women with prolapse attending gynaecology outpatient clinics in UK to a multi-centre RCT of physiotherapy. They describe the systems introduced to address them.

The main issue is that the paper does not describe any successful novel interventions but lists routine practices widely adopted in the face of poor recruitment – trial extension, supporting trial centres and having a dedicated local researcher to facilitate recruitment.

A successful intervention to better inform the GPs about the trial and engage them, would have added to the literature but this was not completed due to the complex process of approvals and laborious set-up processes.

Again barriers to recruitment include well described issues such as staff turnover, lack of support staff, patient preference and lower than anticipated eligible women. These are listed with no or minimal data under any of the headings.

The use of collaborator and participant incentives would have been interesting if definite data was provided for e.g. monthly recruitment figures before and after the introduction of measures, use of a standard method of evaluation of the intervention etc so that robust associations and conclusions could be drawn. For e.g. the authors write - "Interestingly, this (£5 voucher to local team) approach appeared to have a more positive impact on recruitment at some centres than the £55 per women randomised. Whilst only five centres met their recruitment targets every month, recruitment overall improved and centres that had not recruited any women suddenly began to recruit. Through discussions with local researchers recruiting staff appeared to be more enthused by this incentive."

The same applies to communications where the authors describe what they did but do not provide any data to support or refute whether any or all of the interventions were useful. All conclusions are based on impressions. While an RCT of interventions might not have been feasible, they could have asked the trial centre staff to complete an evaluation questionnaire.

There are numerous grammatical mistakes and article requires tight editing.

Level of interest: Reject as not of sufficient priority to merit publishing in this journal
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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