Reviewer's report

Title: Clear obstacles and hidden challenges: Understanding recruitment from the perspective of recruiters in randomised controlled trials

Version: 1 Date: 6 October 2013

Reviewer: Lynne Stobbart

Reviewer's report:

An important, informative and timely paper.

Discretionary Revisions

1. In methods section:
   a) tabulation of numbers and process might improve clarity (rather than 'most' and 'mostly')
   b) Clarify what is meant by ethnographic and iterative approach to analysis.
   c) You say "based on techniques of constant comparison AND grounded theory" - would this be more accurately described as the constant comparative element OF grounded theory?

2. In the results section:
   a) it may be helpful to breakdown your findings into subheadings, but not essential.
   b) Characteristics of RCTs and participants might be more clearly presented in tabular form

3. I presume that the manuscript was submitted for review before the launch of the "Ok to Ask" campaign. Nevertheless, I think that it would be pertinent to make reference to this initiative within the paper, probably within the discussion section as the findings presented here may impact upon the extent of its success.

Major Complusrory Revisions

In the results section:

4. I do not think that the identification of respondents is clear enough or specific enough. It is not enough to know whether the respondent was a doctor or nurse/other. Whilst I believe that this manuscript gives a clear and informative account of the impact of 'recruiter' behaviours and beliefs on the RCT recruitment process and on the outcomes of that process, I think that this requires clarification.

I understand that there are a number of different roles involved in RCT recruitment and subsequent management, and that these roles can vary considerably across different sites or within different specialities and indeed for different studies. In the interests of clarity and in the interpretation of these important findings, I would request that the authors provide clear definitions of
the roles of different personnel involvement in the recruitment process(es), and identify them as such when giving quotes.

By this, I mean that it would be useful to know whether the 'recruiters' were employed purely in a research capacity, in a hybrid 'research clinician' role, or whether they were employed in clinical roles with an expectation that they would also undertake some research activities. It would also be useful to know whether different combinations and ratios of these roles were in existence - eg. which studies had a 'purpose made' research team and which relied solely on ad hoc assistance from clinical staff?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.