Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 8 October 2013

Reviewer: Valerie Shilling

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting manuscript. The manuscript is extremely well written and informative and should provide a useful resource for trial recruiters and those considering trial design. Though a number of the individual observations have been made in other studies of trial recruitment, the arguments are brought together here in an extremely coherent way which does provide a new perspective on barriers to recruitment. A strength of the work lies in the sheer number of practitioners interviewed across trials with a range of recruitment experiences/challenges. The weakness, if it is seen to be as such, is acknowledged by the authors in the overrepresentation of cancer trials. However, previous work in trial recruitment, including that in paediatrics, would suggest that practitioners encounter many of the same difficulties. I like the paper very much however there are a few issues that I would ask the authors to consider. All are suggestions for discretionary revisions.

1. Methods paragraph 1

the authors make reference to ‘some simple quantification’. I saw no evidence of this in the manuscript and wonder whether the sentence refers to the reports produced for the individual RCTs rather than the synthesis presented here?

2. Methods paragraph 2

The readership of the current journal may not be entirely familiar with qualitative methods and processes and with this in mind I find this paragraph a little vague particularly with regard to how the thematic framework was developed initially, whether the same framework was applied to all trials and what “cross-checking of the coding frame within the team” entailed. Similarly I would prefer to see more details of the methods employed to conduct the synthesis; all to provide a little more transparency for the reader.

3. I feel the discussion section could be tightened and hence reduced in length considerable without loss to the arguments.

minor issues not for publication:

Discussion paragraph 3 line 2 - is the word 'been' missing between "as they have" and "in other studies" - I'm not sure.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
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