Reviewer’s report

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

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 9 October 2013

**Reviewer:** Rebecca Tooher

**Reviewer’s report:**

The study investigates a very under-researched area of recruitment to trials – the process, views and impact of the recruiters themselves. While the analysis is relatively straightforward it has allowed new thinking about recruitment to emerge (beyond identifying and confirming the expected barriers to recruitment). The discussion and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data, and the methods are appropriate and well described, and provide sufficient details to replicate the work.

**Major Compulsory Revisions**
None.

**Minor Essential Revisions**
1. p. 4 line 4 “that” is repeated
2. p.8 fourth quote (T7-D4) uses an abbreviation MDT which I don’t think is spelled out previously
3. p.9 line 13 “practise” should be “practice”
4. p.21 line 19 “and preferences” should be deleted

**Discretionary Revisions**
1. p.4 states “Recruitment is an interactional activity and can only occur after at least two meetings...”. I take the point here, however, there are a variety of ways of recruiting which don’t always involve the participant meeting anyone in person. I would suggest that “can only” be replaced by “typically only” to reflect alternate ways of recruiting.
2. Also on p.4 I think perhaps more emphasis could be put on the fact that studies of recruitment to trials rarely examine the process that occurs and whether what recruiters actually do impacts on the success of the recruitment effort. This study together with other studies undertaken by the investigators are some of the few that have looked at this. Yet if one observes the recruitment process or talks to recruiters individual differences in recruiters themselves clearly does have an impact.
3. The study counts one to one interviews and group interviews as equivalent. Yet we know that data generated in groups is typically different to that provided by individuals. It would be useful if this was discussed in terms of any impact it
may have had on the data collected.

4. p. 22 notes that recruitment “is not an activity that all doctors and nurses can or should undertake, and those with very strong views about treatments or stereotyped views should clearly not undertake recruitment.” This statement begs the question – how are we to identify such healthcare workers if as the study suggests those most likely to hold such views may not have the insight to recognise the likely impact on recruitment. It would be useful (if the word limit allows) to perhaps discuss what might be done, or point to this as an area for future research. Similarly, if “individual practitioners will need to acknowledge the anxiety and emotion they experience” it would be helpful to begin to think how this can be enabled.

5. Overall, the findings would be strengthened by the use of a theoretical framework or frameworks to support the interpretation. It is clear that issues of clinical identity and the formation/presentation of the self are at work here and it would be useful if these issues were unpacked to provide greater insight about what has been identified (for example why clinicians appeared to lack insight about the impact of their views on the success of the recruitment effort).

**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 I have no competing interests.