Reviewer's report

Title: Impact and adherence to the CONSORT Statement by high impact factor medical journals: a survey of journal editors and journal Instructions to Authors

Version: 1  Date: 11 February 2008

Reviewer: Nynke Smidt

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

1. Page 7 (results): The authors made a calculation error. I would recommend calculating the RR by hand. The RR should be \( \frac{39/62}{30/103} \approx 2.161 \). Or the authors should change the sentence into: Journals that refer to the ICMJE guidelines were much more likely to refer to the CONSORT statement (39/69) than those journals that did not refer to the ICMJE guidelines (23/96) (RR 2.36).

2. Page 7 (results): The same RR calculation error occurred for the clinical trial register. The RR should be \( \frac{42/62}{19/103} \approx 3.672 \) and not 3.58.

Minor essential revisions

3. Page 1 (title page): Please, change the title of the paper: To my opinion, not the “impact and adherence” to the CONSORT Statement is evaluated but the “implementation (or use, or endorsement)” of the CONSORT statement is evaluated. The word “impact” refers more to the impact on the quality of reporting of RCTs. This isn’t evaluated in this paper.

4. Page 4 (background): In 2003, Altman conducted a study of journal endorsement of the CONSORT Statement and found that eight years following its initial publication and two after its update, only 22% of 166 high impact factor journals provided any mention of CONSORT in their published “Instructions to Authors”. Should it be seven instead of eight years? 2003 - 1996 = 7 years?

5. Page 4 (background): Four years have elapsed since this journal endorsement survey and we believe it is again timely to assess the impact of the CONSORT statement. Should it be 5 years in stead of 4? 2008-2003 = 5 years. Furthermore, what is the main reason to evaluate the endorsement and use of the CONSORT statement? Please, motivate more clearly. Is more attention needed to the CONSORT statement, because the quality of reporting is still poor? Is something changed after the survey of Altman in 2003 (publication 2005)?

6. Page 5 (sample): Does this subheading not belong to the methods?

7. Page 6 (results): Please, report the absolute percentage improvement. The relative increase is misleading. This means, report 16% (38%-22%) and 13%
(39% - 26%).

8. Page 7 (results): Please, report the percentage (ICMJE guidelines 72 of the 166 journals = 43%)

9. Page 7 (results): The sentence â##Those journals which provided some mention of the CONSORT statement in their instructions for authorsâ## were also much more likely to include information about other reporting guidelines. The percentage of the number of journals that reported the other guidelines (QUORUM, MOOSE, REMARK STROBE, TREND) does not support the first sentence. Please provide evidence for this sentence (i.e. How many journals that mentioned CONSORT also mentioned one of the other guidelines, and how many journals that did not report CONSORT reported one of the other guidelines).

10. Pages 7 and 8 (results): It is unclear how many editors of journals confirmed that the CONSORT was mentioned in their instructions for authors: 39 of the 64 responders or 47 of the 58 respondents. The numerator is changing on page 8 from 64, to 57, to 56, to 58, to 53. This is confusingly. Please correct or explain.

11. Page 9 (discussion): How would you recommend journals to keep their instructions up to date?

Discretionary revisions

12. Page 2 (abstract): first sentence. I doubt whether CONSORT only provides recommendations for reporting â##the resultsâ## of RCTs. This sentence should be more correct, including methods etc, or remove the words â##the resultsâ##.

13. Page 2 (abstract): sentence â##we surveyed the editor-in-chief or editorial officeâ##. Is this correct English? Although, I am not a native speaker, I have doubts whether you can survey an editor-in-chief?

14. Page 2 (abstract / methods / results): Does all journals report their instructions for authors online? Some journals only print them in the journal? What did the authors do with these journals? Did all journals have a website?

15. Page 5 (sample): Please, remove last sentence â##One hundred and eighty journalsâ## to the results paragraph.

16. Page 5 (methods): Please specify how editors / the editorial office were contacted (by e-mail or telephone).

17. Page 5 (methods): I am wondering whether the sentence in the methods should be written in the present tense. Should it not be â##In case editors do not response, a reminder will be send after â##weeks and weeksâ##. Finally, authors can report the numbers of reminders send.

18. Page 6 (methods): Did the authors asked questions to the editors which can be found in the instructions to authors (i.e. their journalâ##s endorsement of the CONSORT Statement, whether CONSORT is included in their â##Instructions to
authors'). If the authors have asked questions to the editors which can be found on the journals' website, they might get irritated, explaining the low response. Or do the authors have any (other) explanation Do the authors have any insight whether this was the case?

19. Page 6 (results): First sentence. Should it be 62 (38%) mentioned the CONSORT Statement in their in stead of some mention of?

20. Page 7 (results): Please remove the word indeed.

21. Page 8 (results): Could the authors classify which journal used the CONSORT statement within the editorial process by the reviewer, the author, the editor? This is not clearly described. Furthermore, how many editors of journals checked whether the CONSORT statement was filled in correctly?

22. Page 9 (discussion): What do the authors mean with proper endorsement? I have doubts whether this is investigated in the study of A Plint (reference 10).

23. Pages 9 and 10 (discussion): The authors express their disappointment that the trials should be registered before enrolment of the first patient and that journals should make the same requirements for the CONSORT statement. I would like to remind the authors that CONSORT is not a guideline (checklist) for setting up a RCT, but a guideline to improve reporting of RCTs. Authors could make a statement that CONSORT should not only be used when the data-collection is finished, but that these guidelines could also be used before the start of the patient requirement.

24. Page 9 (discussion): Do the authors have any explanations or ideas why 62% of the journals do not mention CONSORT in their instruction for authors?

25. Page 15 (table 2): Please, describe the difference between the peer review process and the editorial process in the text or legend.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.