Author's response to reviews

Title: Seminars may increase recruitment to randomised controlled trial: lessons learned from WISDOM

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Author's response to reviews:

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Dear Editor,

Re: MS 3148629301192814 ¿Seminars may increase recruitment to randomised controlled trial: lessons learned from WISDOM¿

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to resubmit this manuscript (as per your email dated 11 Oct 2007).

We believe we have addressed the reviewer comments. We have outlined their comments and our responses below.

We hope these changes are to your satisfaction.

Kind Regards,

Bronwen Paine

Responses to REVIEWER 1

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The possibility, acknowledged by the authors, that the association between
participating in a seminar and agreeing to enter the trial is simply the result of selection bias, should be acknowledged in the Abstract. Wording implying a causal relation, such as “Group seminars reduced the number of telephone calls” should be revised to avoid implying that the authors have demonstrated that the seminars were a causal factor in trial enrolment.

The last sentence of the Methods section has been changed to: “In addition, it was estimated that the time required to randomise a woman in the trial, and the number and duration of telephone calls to screen out uninterested women, was reduced for the seminar group.”

2. The comparison of the amount of time required for seminars versus not should be more clear. Why were fewer telephone calls required for women who attended the seminar? Earlier, in the description of methods, it seemed as though all women would be called, whether or not they attended a seminar. Also, “contact time” as shown in Figure 2 does not account for time to prepare for the seminars surely those conducting the seminars spent time preparing their remarks, material to be distributed, etc. Travel time to and from the seminar location for those conducting the seminar should also be accounted for.

The sentence in the Discussion, para 5 explaining the reason for fewer telephone calls has been re-written to provide more clarification: “However, seminar attendees who recognised that they were ineligible or not interested in participating at the end of the seminar had the opportunity to inform the research team via the post-seminar questionnaire, and so these women did not need to be telephoned.”

The seminar given was a standard Microsoft PowerPoint presentation that was prepared prior to commencement of recruitment in May 2001. We have re-written the following sentence in the third paragraph of the Methods section: “The seminar presentation, conducted by one or more of the local investigators, followed a standard Microsoft Powerpoint format and covered the following topics:”

We have added an additional hour to Figure 2 for the additional time spent printing post-seminar questionnaires and travelling time to seminar venues.

3. The discussion of related studies and the speculation that seminars may be more beneficial to certain groups seems too much of a stretch, given that the beneficial effects in this study may not be effects at all but simply selection bias. I would recommend that the authors simply say that if seminars are useful at all, their effects may vary in different populations.

The last sentence of paragraph 6 in the Discussion has been changed to: “These studies suggest that, if seminars are indeed useful, their effectiveness may vary in different populations.”

4. The limitations of the study, including the very real possibility that the effects shown result entirely from selection bias, should be noted in the Conclusions.
The following sentence has been added to the end of the Conclusion:
Nevertheless, given the cross-sectional nature of our study, the potential for selection bias was a possibility, and thus future randomised controlled trials to test seminars as an intervention to improve recruitment are needed.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The dates during which WISDOM enrolled participants should be provided

The dates May 2001 to July 2002 have been added to the Methods section, paragraph 2, line 1.

Responses to REVIEWER 2

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In Sources of Funding AHM has changed to AHS.

Corrected

2. Ref 1 has been published, it would be useful to give full reference.

Corrected

Discretionary Revisions

The author said they have replaced patient with woman or participant throughout the text. They have not, but it is their decision. Anyway, I find it annoying when participants are supposed to be healthy postmenopausal women. I think menopause does not make anybody a patient.

We have decided not to make changes here. Women were not referred to as `participants` in the text until they formally enrolled to participate into the trial. Prior to enrolment, they were referred to as patients since they were specifically recruited from general practice patient lists. We believe that making the distinction between `patient` and `participant` was important given the context of our paper.