Reviewer's report

Title: The uptake and effect of a mailed decision aid on colon cancer screening: a pilot controlled trial

Version: Date: 12 June 2007

Reviewer: Hub Wollersheim

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

This is a small and simple study regarding a major topic; how to improve the inflow into a colon cancer screening programme. Although it is well written there are some major flaws that need to be corrected or added. First the title suggests that the decision aid was the effective part of the multicomponent intervention. No data support that suggestion. Second, not much background information is given. How did the decision aid look like? Which information did the video contain? This is especially important as colon cancer screening is less accepted by MD’s and the community than other types of screening. Furthermore it is harder to explain as there are several screening options.

How does the screening programme patient could directly access look alike? What tests and follow up was offered? Was it in the hospital?

Although there is a small table 2 about patient characteristics to exclude bias the table does not give much information. Which factors could influence patient’s decisions and how were these divided between both groups? There is no information why the non responders did not attend. It would have been a pity if this had not been asked during the telephone survey. The information is important as it should be used to improve further interventions.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Why were the reminder-telephone calls not considered an intervention?

In the primary outcomes on page 10 123 patients are mentioned. I cannot find the details of the 14 patients that were excluded and the reasons for that.

On page 14 relatively tight confidence intervals are mentioned. I could not find these figures in the result section.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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