Author’s response to reviews

Title: A failed attempt to conduct an individual patient data meta-analysis

Authors:

Gerald J Jaspers (geraldjaspers@hotmail.com)
Pieter LJ Degraeuwe (pieter.degraeuwe@mumc.nl)

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for your consideration of our manuscript and request for a revised version. We have copy and pasted all reviewers’ comments below, and address each one individually. As you will see, we have made every attempt to incorporate the suggestions as thoroughly as possible. We hope that you will find the revised paper suitable for publication in Systematic Reviews.

Yours sincerely,

Gerald J. Jaspers, MD
Pieter L.J. Degraeuwe, MD, PhD

I’m curious to know whether they employed further tactics and incentives to obtain data other than emailing a few times. For example, did they call the investigators, did they try to enlist the help of intermediaries, did they form an international advisory group to lend weight to the project, did they emphasise the collaborative nature of the project, did they share the protocol, did they offer investigators the chance to comment on the protocol, did they think about raising funds for a collaborative group meeting to present and discuss the results, did they offer to go and transcribe the data from notes themselves, did they circulate newsletters updating on progress and highlighting the groups that had already agreed to collaborate? If they did some of these things it would be good to know. If they didn’t perhaps they have given up too early - these projects can operate as slow burners to start with...

Authors’ reply:
We understand the reviewer’s concern regarding our decision to give up the project. We have not used all the listed tactics but we made a reasonable effort to obtain collaboration. Two experts in the field were contacted to evaluate and co-author the study protocol. Professor Nicola Robertson (University College London) fully supported our project, but another researcher and expert in the field, persisted in his refusal to collaborate, even after contact by phone. He was in the process of reviewing his own data, together with another large research group. We offered to withhold the results of our individual patient data meta-analysis, until his own review was completed, but, much to our regret, request for data was met with refusal both by phone and email. The study protocol, clearly stating the need for cooperation, was appended to our email requesting participation in the project. We indicated that comments were welcome and appreciated, and underscored the support of Prof. Robertson. In the reminder emails we mentioned the positive reactions already received from other research groups.
We have added most of this additional information to the new version of our paper.

I would particularly like to know more regarding the refusals to provide data based on "we don’t have the personnel". Were the authors requesting new data collection? "

Authors’ reply:
Although we did invite authors to include longer term follow up data if this was available, no new data was requested from the authors. We interpret "we don't have the personnel" as a diplomatic way to refuse collaboration.