Reviewer's report

Title: Clinical Trialist perspectives on the Ethics of Adaptive Clinical Trials: A Mixed-Methods Analysis

Version: 1 Date: 10 October 2014

Reviewer: Andrew McRae

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Major Compulsory Revisions

This is overall a well-presented study that contributes empirical data about scientists' beliefs to the ethical discourse on ACTs. That said, I think the authors miss the mark with the aim of their conclusions. While it is true, that team members from different disciplines “being on the same ethical page” is important in terms of the design and conduct of a trial, I think there’s a bigger picture here that needs more treatment by the authors. Because the ethics of ACTs have not been rigorously addressed (much like the way that the ethics of cluster-randomized trials have only received substantive attention in the past 5-7 years), there is a need for robust and rigorous discussion amongst the broader research and ethics professional communities, regulators and funding agencies. I’d suggest that this data can provide some useful information to that discussion (specifically this provides enumeration of ethical challenges that deserve more thorough consideration). This this study’s findings deserve some consideration in that context in the discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions

--While there is some description of the respondents in the beginning of the results section, some more description of in the methods would be welcome. Please be explicit about the relationship between the study sample and the ADAPT-IT team (are they co-investigators, consultants or some combination of the above).

--What steps were taken to ensure maximal response rate for the surveys? Dillman method reminders? Incentives?

--How were the four respondents who provided feedback selected—randomly or in some considered fashion?

--While it is obvious that the likert scale anchors of 0 and 100 correspond to “definitely not” and “definitely” respectively, but readers might find it helpful to have this reinforced in the figure rather than just the numerical scale on the vertical axis.

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: None