Reviewer's report

Title: Participants' awareness of ethical compliance, safety and protection during participation in pharmaceutical industry clinical trials: a controlled survey

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Reviewer: Gilles Cambonie

Reviewer's report:

Comments to the Author

This manuscript by Gerardo González-Saldivar et al assesses participants' awareness of ethical compliance, safety and protection during participation in pharmaceutical industry clinical trials in a developing country. The authors make comparisons with a control group, non-participants of industry-sponsored research trials (ISRT).

We would like to congratulate the authors on conducting this interesting survey. However, I have major remarks and questions, mainly for the methodological aspects.

1. Background:

A hypothesis is missing at the end of this chapter. What did the authors want to demonstrate in this survey?

2. Methods:

- Twelve individual semi-structured interviews were conducted at 6 out of 12 research sites. Could you precise the criteria for the selection of these centers?

- Who and how were the 50 cases and 50 controls recruited in each center? Did you randomize among the participants of pharmaceutical clinical trials and among disease matching controls?

- How did you ensure the balance of participants between phase II and phase III trials?

- Have you checked whether the participants in the clinical trials were evenly divided between those exposed to active ingredients and those exposed to placebos?
Finally, how did you calculate the number of subjects for this survey? To answer which hypothesis?

Cases were former or current participants of phase II or III pharmaceutical clinical trials who had attended at least their sixth visit. In this context, a memory bias is likely, especially for the questions about "Enrollment" and "Informed consent" of the table 3. Why not ask these questions right after inclusion in the pharmaceutical trials?

A staff member, not involved in the participants' clinical research, obtained the participant's demographic data, applied the survey, clarified any question and ensured survey completion. This element is amazing, even if the staff member, not involved in the participants' clinical research, this could induce a response bias. Did participants have an envelope for their answers? Was their identity anonymized?

Cases and controls answered 9 multiple-choice questions, each with 2 to 9 response options. Why did not you harmonize the questions? 9 possible answers to the same question is not a recommended format, the latest proposals are read with less attention than the first.

Did cases and controls receive economical reimbursement to answer the questionnaire? Was this survey planned in the pharmaceutical clinical trials considered?

3. Results:

Female to male ratio in both groups was 2:1. How do you explain this result?

Table 1 indicates the number 604 for the study population and each of the 4 diseases. Please indicate the appropriate numbers.

Table 2 shows the results for each question in descending order of the response rate. Were the questions asked in this way? One can have the feeling, if it is the case, of induced answers.

For questions 10 to 14 included in Table 3, did the answers come spontaneously from participants in the pharmaceutical trials, or were they induced by a response scheme?
For questions 15 to 21 in Table 3, do participants see a pictogram or analog scale to help them answer?

4. Discussion

- "First, the trail design does not permit to study the influence that participating." Is this sentence complete? I do not understand the meaning.

- In my opinion, there are many other limitations in this study, please see my comments above.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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