Reviewer's report

Title: Can oral corticosteroids reduce the severity or duration of an acute cough, and the associated NHS and societal costs, in adults presenting to primary care? Study protocol of the Oral Steroids for Acute Cough (OSAC) randomised controlled trial

Version: 1
Date: 5 December 2014

Reviewer: Peter Alan Coventry

Reviewer's report:

1) There is sufficient detail in the trial protocol to allow replication.
2) The standard of English and reporting is good.

Additional comments:
- Could the aims and background be separated in the Abstract - the last part of the background includes methodological notes that might be better placed elsewhere.
- The Discussion in the Abstract is the first time OSAC is mentioned but it is not defined.
- Could the authors explain what they mean by 'subjective' outcomes in the rationale for trial design section. Is this alluding to the fact that this is an area where there is no consensus about the outcomes and is there scope to build in here a link to COMET - will the trial contribute to developing core outcomes for comparable trials?
- The authors say that the trial is multicentre to ensure generalisable sample is recruited but I think this is more to do with ensuring they reach their target unless the distribution of centres is likely to yield different types of patients.
- Perhaps reorder so randomisation, allocation and then blinding are discussed and then outcomes.
- Why can Mondays not be used after a weekend for recruitment?
- Why is 56 days the maximum period for weekly calls - is this the cut-off for acute LTRI i.e. after 56 days it ceases to be an acute event?