Reviewer's report

Title: Missing steps in a stair case: a qualitative study of the perspectives of key stakeholders on the use of adaptive designs in confirmatory trials

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Reviewer: Christopher Coffey

Reviewer's report:

This is a very interesting manuscript that provides a discussion of important barriers in the publicly funded environment that are preventing an increased use of adaptive designs. The findings provide an important contribution to the literature.

In general, this is a very well written manuscript. I have only a couple of moderate concerns:

1) The text describing the potential barriers seems a bit on the long side, and becomes a bit difficult to read. The authors might consider whether the text could be condensed a bit, perhaps by focusing more on the high level findings.

2) On the opposite side of the spectrum, only 3 lines are devoted to facilitators recommended by respondents to address these barriers (though more information is provided in Table 5). It seems that this should be expanded a bit, since a discussion of how to remove these barriers is a critical component of this discussion.

One additional minor concern is that it, if the information exists, it might be helpful to summarize the past experience of the survey respondents with respect to working on actual adaptive designs. For instance, it is unclear whether the participants have worked on adaptive designs in the past, have considered adaptive designs in the past but not used them due to the barriers discussed here, or have little past experience with clinical trials. A summary of this information would help to put the findings in a bit more context.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.