Reviewer's report

Title: "We all want to succeed, but we've also got to be realistic about what is happening": An ethnographic study of relationships in trial oversight and their impact

Version: 0 Date: 04 Sep 2017

Reviewer: Christel McMullan

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article on how the relationships between the stakeholders affect the trial oversight process.

My main comment lies around the concept of 'ethnography' and the risk of overusing it. It is difficult to see in which ways this 'ethnographic' study differs from an 'ordinary' qualitative study and what the added-value is.

Therefore, the manuscript would benefit from more justification for choosing to carry out an ethnographic study and what the added-value of such a methodology is. In addition, it would benefit from having more detail on the advantages/inconveniences of the ethnographic methods used, in particular the observations: were they overt/covert and what were the reasons for it?

Page 4: "CIs" should read "Chief Investigators (CIs)"

Page 6: "Standardised observation schedule" - Can you give more detail on this?

Page 8: what does "TM" refer to?

Page 8: Need for consistency when identifying the quotes: "trial" (line 53) whereas you refer to "RCT" in the rest of the quotes.

Page 10: "RCTl" should read "RCT"

Page 12: "#38, Independent TSC member RCT 7" should read "#38, Independent TSC member, RCT 7"
Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Quality of figures
All images and figures within the manuscript should be genuine i.e. without evidence of manipulation. No specific feature within an image may be enhanced, obscured, moved, removed, or introduced. If you have concerns about the veracity of the figures you should choose the first option below.

Statistical review
Is it essential that this manuscript is seen by an expert statistician? If so, please give your reasons in your report.

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal