Reviewer’s report

Title: "Recruitment, recruitment, recruitment" - the need for more focus on retention: A qualitative study of five trials

Version: 1 Date: 09 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Ditte Linde

Reviewer’s report:

Overall, this is a well-written and interesting paper to read. The approach of getting first-hand accounts through qualitative interviews in order to understand what elements affect retention in RCTs is relevant and somewhat original. Generally, the methodology is clearly described and the results are thoroughly outlined. However, the article has some shortcomings, which I will encourage the authors to address:

1. Please clarify how many interviews were done over phone versus face-to-face. Further, I encourage the authors in the limitation section to reflect upon the issue of one interview being done over email as well as the challenges of telephone interviews compared to face-to-face interviews.

2. Please be consistent in how you place your references. All references should be placed in the end of a sentence (before the full stop) and not in the beginning of a new sentence (after the full stop). This issue also occurs in your quotes.

3. Please elaborate on what your sampling framework consisted of (Paragraph "Sample and Recruitment").

4. In your discussion, please consider that different health areas may face different issues with retention due to the nature the disease/health area.

5. A key finding of yours, which I will inspire you to clarify in further detail is that even when the study set-up is an RCT, personal factors still play a role and can indirectly affect the study outcomes (validity, power, etc.). Additionally, stress more clearly that you have found that both formal and informal/personal factors that affect retention, and that these elements needs to be considered when designing future RCTs. Consider drafting a flow chart that provides an overview of the different type of factors.

6. I would suggest that "Informed Consent Forms" are to be available upon request.

Level of interest

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field
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 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