

# **SWAT 82: Sending Christmas cards to trial participants to improve retention.**

## **Objective of this SWAT**

To evaluate the effect on retention of sending Christmas cards to trial participants.

Study area: Retention

Sample type: Participants

Estimated funding level needed: Low

## **Background**

Christmas cards are often used to encourage participants to continue participation in a trial. A recent survey of UK registered Clinical Trials Units found that 40% had used Christmas cards as a retention intervention.[1] However, there is no evidence that providing Christmas cards improves retention. For those trials that use resources (both time and money) to send Christmas cards, there is a potential opportunity cost in that these resources might be better invested in other potentially more effective interventions. On the other hand, there could be a case for routine use of this incentive if there was evidence to support it.

It is possible that trial participants' reactions to Christmas cards differ depending on who and how the cards are signed (e.g. on behalf of trial team or lists specific names, are handwritten (or e-signatures) or typed). This could be investigated across different implementations of this SWAT or in sub-randomisations for the intervention group.

## **Interventions and comparators**

Intervention 1: Christmas card to the trial participant.

Intervention 2: No Christmas card.

Index Type: Building loyalty for the trial

## **Method for allocating to intervention or comparator**

Randomisation

## **Outcome measures**

Primary: Number of participants retained.

Secondary: Cost per participant retained.

## **Analysis plans**

The primary analysis is the difference in retention rate between those receiving the Christmas card and those receiving no such incentive. Similarly, the secondary analysis is the difference in cost per participant retained between those sent the Christmas card and those not. In addition to the direct costs of the Christmas card and postage, it may also be necessary to include the cost of staff time spent administering the mail out (for example filling and labelling envelopes).

## **Possible problems in implementing this SWAT**

The main barrier in implementing this SWAT relates to staff time to complete the mail out. There may be resistance from trial staff if a trials unit or trial team has always sent out Christmas cards but this could perhaps be addressed by being clear that currently there is no evidence of benefit and taking part in the SWAT could provide that evidence.

## **References**

1. Kearney A, Daykin A, Shaw ARG, et al. Identifying effective retention strategies: a research agenda. *Trials* 2017;18:406

## **Publications or presentations of this SWAT design**

## **Examples of the implementation of this SWAT**

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