

# **SWAT 13: Financial incentives to complete follow-up questionnaires in a randomised trial**

## **Objective of this SWAT**

To improve the response rate to the participant completed questionnaires at 1 and 2 years which provide the primary outcome data and information on other outcomes in a randomised trial.

Study area: Follow-up; Retention.

Sample type: Participants (Patients).

Estimated funding level needed: Medium (depending on the size of the incentive).

## **Background**

This SWAT has been conducted as the IONTI (Incentivise Or Not To Incentivise) 1 and INOTI 2 studies, as part of the eTHoS trial comparing two types of surgery for haemorrhoids.[1] IONTI 1 compared the effects of a £5 gift voucher along with the questionnaire and letter to participants reaching their 1 and/or 2 years follow-up. IONTI 2 assessed the impact of an incentive of a £30 gift voucher. These SWAT were implemented because the response to the 1 year postal questionnaire within eTHoS was lower than anticipated and, this, together with the 2 year data forms a vital part of the primary outcome measures. Therefore, there was a need to consider options to improve the level of response. Previous work has suggested that monetary incentives may be beneficial and while a substantial number of study have been carried out the vast majority are not within a randomised trial in health care.[2] Additionally, few have been carried out in the UK or have tested the use of gift vouchers. Gates and colleagues showed a beneficial impact in a £5 gift voucher in a quasi-randomised trial within a cluster randomised trial of advice for whiplash patients.[3] There is a need for further studies, ideally fully randomised, which assess whether this finding is generalisable to other clinical settings. Furthermore, eTHoS presented an opportunity to assess the introduction of an incentive part way through the trial to address lower than anticipated response to a postal questionnaire. This is a scenario that trialists regularly face but with little evidence to guide their decision.

## **Interventions and comparators**

Intervention 1: Gift voucher sent with questionnaires at both 1 and 2 years.

Intervention 2: Gift voucher sent with questionnaires at 1 year.

Intervention 3: Gift voucher sent with questionnaires at 2 years.

Intervention 4: No gift voucher sent with either questionnaire.

Index Type: Incentive

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

Various.

## **Outcome measures**

Primary outcomes: Response to questionnaire at 1 and 2 years.

Secondary outcomes: Response without a reminder at 1 and 2 years.

## **Analysis plans**

The primary analysis for IONTI 1 will be akin to a trial analysis of the impact of an incentive of a £5 gift voucher at 1 and/or 2 years to encourage response to a postal questionnaire which can be completed by paper or online. Additionally a non-randomised comparison of the impact of the incentives versus response rate prior to IONTI will be carried out. The primary analysis for IONTI 2 will be a before and after analysis of the impact of the incentive gift voucher at 1 and/or 2 years to encourage response to a postal questionnaire which can be completed by paper or online.

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

The need for ethical approval for sending the incentives.

## **References**

1. Watson AJM, Bruhn H, Macleod K, McDonald A, McPherson G, Kilonzo M, Norrie J, Loudon M, McCormack K, Buckley B, Brown S, Curran F, Jayne DG, Rajagopal R, Cook JA. A pragmatic

multicentre randomised controlled trial comparing stapled haemorrhoidopexy to traditional excisional surgery for haemorrhoidal disease (eTHoS): study protocol for a randomised controlled trial. *Trials* 2014; 15: 439.

2. Edwards PJ, Roberts I, Clarke MJ, DiGiuseppi C, Wentz R, Kwan I, Cooper R, Felix LM, Prata S. Methods to increase response to postal and electronic questionnaires. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2009; (3): MR000008.

3. Gates S, Williams MA, Withers E, Williamson E, Mt-Isa S, Lamb SE. Does a monetary incentive improve the response to a postal questionnaire in a randomised controlled trial? The MINT incentive study. *Trials* 2009; 10: 44.

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

1. Bruhn H, McDonald A, Watson A, Norrie J. Ensuring a high response rate to patient reported outcomes in surgical trials using incentives – a trial manager perspective. Paper presentation at Clinical Trials Methodology Conference (CTMC), 18-19 November, Edinburgh, UK.

2. Bruhn H, Wood, J, McDonald A, Watson A, Norrie J. Setting-up a SWAT (Study Within A Trial) – a Trial Manager’s experience. Invited presentation at MRC Network of Hubs for Trials Methodology Research (HTMR Network) Annual Meeting for the HTMR Trial Conduct Working Group, 27 January 2015, Bristol, UK.

3. Bruhn H, Wood, J, McDonald A, Watson A, Norrie J. Setting-up a SWAT (Study Within A Trial) – a Trial Manager’s experience. Invited webinar for the MRC HTMR Trial Conduct Working Group, 10 February 2015, online. Available from [http://www.methodologyhubs.mrc.ac.uk/webinars-\\_trial\\_conduct/feb\\_2015.aspx](http://www.methodologyhubs.mrc.ac.uk/webinars-_trial_conduct/feb_2015.aspx).

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