

# **SWAT 24: Using a theoretically informed cover letter to improve response rates to annual postal questionnaires.**

## **Objective of this SWAT**

To improve response rates to annual postal questionnaires which provide information on patient reported outcomes in a randomised trial.

Study area: Follow-up, Retention

Sample type: Participants

Estimated funding level needed: Unfunded

## **Background**

This SWAT has been conducted as part of the IQuaD trial, a randomised trial comparing oral hygiene advice and periodontal instrumentation for the prevention and management of periodontal disease in dentate adults attending dental primary care [1]. The SWAT was implemented because the response rate to the first annual postal questionnaire issued to IQuaD participants was lower than expected, putting the validity and generalisability of the trial and its results in jeopardy. Return of a postal questionnaire can be considered a behaviour and therefore a novel behaviour change intervention was developed to target the desired behaviour; participants returning a questionnaire. The behaviour change intervention was developed by a health psychologist using the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF) as a tool for identifying theoretical targets for behaviour change interventions [2], based on expert consensus discussions with IQuaD trial investigators who were involved in the recruitment process. Behaviour change techniques targeting the identified domains were operationalised in the cover letter accompanying the postal questionnaires. Participants due the annual questionnaire (at either year 1 or 2) were randomised to receive either the theoretically informed cover letter or standard cover letter with their postal questionnaire. Response rates were compared. Further details of the intervention design and a template of the letters can be found on the IQuaD website ([w3.abdn.ac.uk/hsru/IQuaD/Public/DownloadPage.aspx](http://w3.abdn.ac.uk/hsru/IQuaD/Public/DownloadPage.aspx)). The theoretically informed letter was found to significantly improve the response rate to the annual questionnaire in the IQuaD trial. The implementation of this intervention in other settings will test the usefulness of this approach as an evidence based method to improve response rates to postal questionnaires.

## **Interventions and comparators**

Intervention 1: Theoretically informed cover letter issued with annual questionnaires (year 1 and 2).

Intervention 2: Standard cover letter issued with annual questionnaires (year 1 and 2).

Index Type: Method of Follow-up

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

Randomisation

## **Outcome measures**

Primary: Response rate to annual questionnaires at year 1 and at year 2.

Secondary: None.

## **Analysis plans**

Primary analysis will be a comparison of the number of questionnaires issued and returned between the intervention groups.

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

Ethical approval will be needed to amend the cover letters sent to participants.

## **References**

1. Clarkson JE, Ramsay CR, Averley P, et al. IQuaD dental trial; improving the quality of dentistry: a multicentre randomised controlled trial comparing oral hygiene advice and periodontal instrumentation for the prevention and management of periodontal disease in dentate adults attending dental primary care. *BMC Oral Health* 2013; 13(1):58.
2. Michie S, Johnston M, Abraham C, et al. Making psychological theory useful for implementing evidence based practice. *Quality & Safety in Health Care* 2005; 14:26-33.

**Publications or presentations of this SWAT design**

Duncan A. Improving trial questionnaire response rates using behaviour change theory. Invited oral presentation at Scottish Primary Care Research Network (SPCRN) Scientific meeting, 23 March 2015, Edinburgh UK.

Duncan A, Bonetti D, Clarkson J, Ramsay C on behalf of the IQuaD Trial. Improving trial questionnaire response rates using behaviour change theory. Poster presentation at 3rd International Clinical Trials Methodology Conference (ICTMC) November 2015, Glasgow, UK.

**Examples of the implementation of this SWAT**

Clarkson JE, Ramsay CR, Averley P, et al. IQuaD dental trial; improving the quality of dentistry: a multicentre randomised controlled trial comparing oral hygiene advice and periodontal instrumentation for the prevention and management of periodontal disease in dentate adults attending dental primary care. BMC Oral Health 2013; 13(1):58.

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