

SWAT 53: Including a photograph on the invitation letter for a prospective study

Objective of this SWAT

To examine the effects on recruitment of having a familiar or generic doctor-patient photograph on the letter inviting people to take part in a prospective study.

Study area: Recruitment, Outcomes

Sample type: Participants

Estimated funding level needed: Low

Background

Recruitment to clinical trials is a major problem with many trials failing to recruit and retain adequate numbers of participants. This can lead to the failure of trials to recruit a sufficient number of participants and leave the research question for the trial unanswered. Alongside the loss of valuable healthcare and scientific knowledge, there is a waste of resources and time. Times to completion for trials can be prolonged and the costs of trials can increase. Further evidence is needed to identify the optimal strategies to recruit participants to trials.[1,2]

The Mere Exposure Effect is a phenomenon in psychology in which people tend to prefer elements that they are familiar with.[3] This can be applied to people and the idea is that the more often an individual is seen by someone, the more welcoming that person will appear. This SWAT will investigate whether this could be used to boost recruitment to trial by testing the use of patient-doctor imagery. It will be implemented in two unrelated trials and the results will be compared.

Interventions and comparators

Intervention 1: Generic patient-doctor photo in the invitation letter

Intervention 2: Familiar patient-doctor photo in the invitation letter

Intervention 3: No photo in the invitation letter

Index Type: Method of Invitation, Method of Recruitment

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator

Randomisation

Outcome measures

Primary: Proportion of recipients of the invitation letter who join the study.

Secondary: Proportion of recruited participants who remain in the study.

Time between patient receiving the invitation letter and their recruitment to the trial.

Analysis plans

This SWAT will compare recruitment and retention during the trial between the three groups.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAT

Some people who are given the familiar photo of a doctor (intervention 2) might not recognise the doctor.

Some people may have negative perceptions of the doctor based on their prior experience.

References

1. Treweek S, Mitchell E, Pitkethly M, et al. Strategies to improve recruitment to randomised controlled trials. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2010; (4): MR000013.
2. Mahon E, Roberts J, Furlong P, et al. Barriers to clinical trial recruitment and possible solutions: a stakeholder survey. *Applied Clinical Trials* 2015
3. Zajonc RB. Mere Exposure: a gateway to the subliminal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2001; 10: 224.

Publications or presentations of this SWAT design

Examples of the implementation of this SWAT

People to show as the source of this idea: Rohan Anand and Natasha Green

Contact email address: ranand01@qub.ac.uk

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Revisions made by:

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