SWAT 87: Do participants complete the original or the reminder postal follow up questionnaire?

Objective of this SWAT
To determine, in people who are sent a reminder postal follow up questionnaire, whether they complete the original postal questionnaire or the reminder questionnaire.

Study area: Follow-up
Sample type: Participants
Estimated funding level needed: Very Low

Background
Postal follow up questionnaires are widely used in clinical trials to collect outcomes such as patient reported pain, function and quality of life. These questionnaires enable researchers to collect follow up data from a large group of people more efficiently than by face-to-face interviews. However, the preparation, printing and mailing of participant follow up questionnaires can be burdensome for a trial team, and the cost and time taken to print paper questionnaires (especially lengthy ones) can be high. A reminder questionnaire is often sent to non-responders in order to maximise participant retention and data completeness.[1] However, if the participant does not use the reminder questionnaire and completes the original one instead, it is neither cost-effective or a good use of time to provide the reminder questionnaires. Instead, a simple reminder letter could suffice. This SWAT aims to determine, in people who are sent a reminder postal follow up questionnaire, whether they complete the original version or the subsequent reminder.

Interventions and comparators
Intervention 1: 'Original' questionnaires will be identified by a green sticker on the front page and a red sticker will be used for 'reminder' questionnaires. When the questionnaires are received by the trials office, the date and questionnaire type will be logged using the Trial Central Management system.

Index Type: Method of Follow-up

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator
Observational. All participants in the SWAT (i.e. those sent reminders to complete their follow up questionnaire) will receive both an original and a reminder questionnaire.

Outcome measures
Primary: Proportion of questionnaires returned by people sent a reminder that were the 'Reminder' or the 'Original' questionnaire.
Secondary: Time to response, defined as the number of days between the 'Reminder' questionnaire being mailed out and a completed questionnaire being received by the trial team.

Analysis plans
The primary analysis will compare the proportions of the two types of questionnaires returned by participants who were sent both the original and reminder questionnaire.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAT
The time frame for collecting outcome data in a clinical trial can be short and reminder postal follow up questionnaires are usually sent to non-responders within 2-3 weeks of the original questionnaire. Therefore, some questionnaires may already have been completed and posted back to the trial team when the reminder questionnaire is sent. Assessing time to response should identify whether this is a problem in implementing this SWAT.

References
1. Edwards PJ, Roberts I, Clarke MJ, et al. Methods to increase response to postal and electronic questionnaires. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2009;(3):MR000008.

Publications or presentations of this SWAT design

Examples of the implementation of this SWAT

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Revisions made by:
Date of revisions: