

# SWAT 92: Pen incentive to enhance retention in a randomised trial

## Objective of this SWAT

To evaluate the effects on retention of providing a pen with the 3-month follow-up questionnaire.

Study area: Retention

Sample type: Participants

Estimated funding level needed: Very Low

## Background

There is some evidence that using a pen as a nonmonetary incentive increases response rates to surveys and time to response for follow-up questionnaires in trials [1, 2]. The theoretical basis underlying the use of pen incentives is that of reciprocation, where people feel obligated to respond with positive behaviour received, with positive behaviour in return [3-6]. In the context of recruitment to trials, offering a potential participant a gift such as a pen may make the person more likely to take up the trial invitation to enrol; and providing a pen as part of the request for follow-up may do similar for retention. It is also possible that the convenience of having a pen to hand when being asked to complete a form may increase its likelihood of being completed. A trial in the USA, embedded in an observational study, showed that including a pen with the study logo to a questionnaire mailed to women who had previously not responded significantly improved recruitment rates [7]. However, to our knowledge, there have been no trials, which have evaluated the impact of using a pen to increase retention in a randomised trial (although SWAT 18 includes an evaluation of a pen as an incentive to join a case-control study).

## Interventions and comparators

Intervention 1: Pen printed with the trial logo sent along with the 3-month follow-up questionnaire.

Intervention 2: No pen.

Index Type: Incentive

## Method for allocating to intervention or comparator

Randomisation

## Outcome measures

Primary: Proportion of participants who return the 3-month questionnaire.

Secondary: Time to response (length of time taken to return the questionnaire), completeness of response (number of questions completed) and whether a reminder notice is required (number of participants requiring a reminder mailing divided by the number of participants who were sent a questionnaire).

## Analysis plans

Binary data will be compared using logistic regression, time to response by a Cox proportional hazards model, and completeness of response by a linear regression model. All models will adjust for age, gender, and allocation for a separate factorial SWAT that is embedded at the recruitment stage (anyone not randomised into the factorial trial will be considered in the 'no pen' group).

## Possible problems in implementing this SWAT

No problems anticipated.

## References

1. Brueton VC, et al. Strategies to improve retention in randomised trials. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2013;(12): MR000032.
2. Bell K, et al., Enclosing a pen reduced time to response to questionnaire mailings. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 2016;74:144-50.
3. Gouldner AW. The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review* 1960:161-178.
4. Cialdini RB, et al. Reciprocal concessions procedure for inducing compliance: The door-in-the-face technique. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology* 1975;31(2):206.
5. Regan DT. Effects of a favor and liking on compliance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 1971;7(6):627-39.

6. Falk A, Fischbacher U. A theory of reciprocity. *Games and Economic Behavior* 2006;54(2):293-315.
7. White E, et al. Increasing response to mailed questionnaires by including a pencil/pen. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2005;162(3):261-6.

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

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

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