

SWAT 94: Incentive (financial and pen) to enhance recruitment to a randomised trial

Objective of this SWAT

To evaluate the effects on recruitment rates of offering a small, unconditional financial incentive, a pen or both in the recruitment pack for potential participants in a randomised trial.

Study area: Recruitment

Sample type: Patients

Estimated funding level needed: Low

Background

Financial incentives are often used to encourage individuals to take part in a trial. In the UK, the size of the incentive is generally modest for publicly-funded trials, often in the order of £10-£20. There is evidence that providing a financial incentive improves recruitment. The Cochrane Methodology Review on recruitment interventions found that financial incentives increased recruitment by 4% (95% CI -1% to 8%) [1]. However, there was inconsistency between the studies included in the meta-analysis and the confidence interval leaves open the possibility for reducing recruitment. Moreover, most studies included in the review used an incentive of £100, which is larger than that generally used in publicly-funded trials. There remains, therefore, uncertainty as to whether the intervention should be widely used, or how much the incentive should be.

There is some evidence that using a pen as a nonmonetary incentive increases response rates and time to response for trial follow-up questionnaires [2, 3]. 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 [4-7]. In the context of trial recruitment, offering a potential participant a gift such as a pen may make the person more likely to take up the invitation to enrol in the trial. It is also possible that the convenience of having a pen to hand upon receipt of the invitation may increase the likelihood of the forms 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 [8]. In this SWAT, we will test whether a pen increases recruitment to a randomised trial of yoga for older adults with multimorbidity. It complements SWAT 18 which examined this for a case-control study.

Interventions and comparators

Intervention 1: £5 cash

Intervention 2: Pen printed with the trial or university logo

Intervention 3: Pen printed with the trial or university logo and £5 cash

Intervention 4: No incentive (neither £5 nor pen)

Index Type: Incentive

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator

Randomisation

Outcome measures

Primary: Proportion of participants who are randomised into the host trial.

Secondary: Proportion of participants who return a screening form and time to return screening form.

Analysis plans

Randomisation rates will be calculated for each SWAT intervention (pen and £5). A logistic regression model containing the two interventions will be performed. Adjusted odds ratios and corresponding 95% CI will be obtained from this model. The presence of an interaction between the two interventions will be tested by introducing the interaction term of the interventions into the logistic model. The proportion of participants who return a screening form will be similarly analysed. Time to return of the screening form will be calculated as the number of days from the date the recruitment pack is sent out to the date it is returned. A Cox proportional hazards

regression model containing the two interventions will be performed and hazard ratios and corresponding 95% CI will be presented. For the time-to-event analysis, screening forms that are not returned will be treated as censored.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAT

Human error when including £5 or the pen in the correct invitations packs.

References

1. Treweek S, et al., Strategies to improve recruitment to randomised trials. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2018;(2):MR000013.
2. Brueton VC, et al. Strategies to improve retention in randomised trials. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2013;(12):MR000032.
3. Bell K, et al. Enclosing a pen reduced time to response to questionnaire mailings. Journal of Clinical Epidemiology 2016;74:144-50.
4. Gouldner AW. The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. American Sociological Review 1960:161-78.
5. 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.
6. Regan DT. Effects of a favor and liking on compliance. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 1971;7(6):627-39.
7. Falk A, Fischbacher U. A theory of reciprocity. Games and Economic Behavior 2006;54(2):293-315.
8. 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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