

Reviewer's report

Title: Effectiveness of strategies to encourage general practitioners to accept an offer of free access to online evidence-based information: A randomised controlled trial.

Version: 1 **Date:** 4 June 2009

Reviewer: Martin Lee

Reviewer's report:

This is a very interesting attempt to understand what can be used to motivate physicians to use online resources, but in general can be inferred to other educational tools. The sample used is quite large and we should assume would have provided an answer to whether there are differences to the various approaches. However, before the paper can be published, I would like to responses to the following points.

Major Compulsory Revisions

- 1) There is a justification given for the use of a sample size of 14,000, but it is unclear as to why the survey did not just include all 18,262 eligible doctors. Clearly the cost of the incremental number would not have been great and the possibility of obtaining a universal result for Australia would have been sufficient motivation.
- 2) In the statistical methods section, the authors note that small numbers in cells required that categories be combined, presumably to use standard large sample chi-square approximations. This seems unnecessary given the easy availability of software that allows for the exact calculation of p-values under these circumstances and avoiding the arbitrary combination of categories for a specific qualitative covariate.
- 3) No multivariate analysis was considered here and it is not clear why. I would have assumed that the use of a logistic regression model evaluating the relationship between acceptance with the study groups and controlling for the sociodemographic variables would be interesting to evaluate. This would be true regardless of the findings from the univariate comparisons because of the potential for interesting results on a multivariate basis.
- 4) The biggest concern I have about the study is the difference between responders and non-responders. The authors note that the randomized group were comparable at "baseline" in the sense that the seven arms of the study started out similar with respect to the sociodemographic variables. On the other hand it is noted that responders were different than non-responders. It is not at all clear whether these differences were consistent across the study groups and whether an adjustment for responder/non-responder differences would alter the conclusions of the study. Furthermore, is it clear from the wording of the letters

sent that a lack of response indicates a lack of interest in the on-line resource or merely a lack of interest in any unsolicited mailer? That is, suppose the letter had requested a response of interest or non-interest. Then it would be possible to distinguish to a certain extent between the two possibilities I have raised. As is well known, the response rate to any mail survey is relatively low. The assumption is being made here by the authors that the difference in response rates is due to the type of intervention, when, in fact, it might be due to differences in the general response to unsolicited mailers by different sociodemographic groups. I would like to see an attempt to tease out these different explanations for the results.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) I think it would be appropriate to see the wording of the letter(s) used in this survey included in the paper

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.