SWAT 4: Description of the study / project in an invitation letter for a prospective study

Objective of this SWAT
To examine the effect on recruitment of describing the research as a ‘trial’, 'study' or as a 'project'.

Study area: Recruitment; retention.
Sample type: Participant.
Estimated funding level needed: None.

Background
Methods to boost recruitment in trials are top priorities for methodological research, as identified by the directors of UK Clinical Trial Units.[1] Indeed, studies of recruitment suggest that at least 50% of trials fail to achieve their recruitment targets,[2] which may result in an underpowered trial thereby increasing waste and the risk that an effective intervention will be abandoned before its true value is appreciated, or delays in demonstrating the benefits of an intervention while further trials are carried out. Poor recruitment can also lead to a trial being extended, increasing costs; and might affect any prospective study that involves invite people to join the study. More research is needed to identify strategies which, even if they are only moderately effective could have an important impact on the costs or duration of a study.[3] This SWAT explores the effects of describing the research as a ‘trial’ ‘study’, or ‘project’ in the invitation letter, on the recruitment to a study and on whether those who are recruited remain in the study.

Interventions and comparators
Intervention 1: Invitation letter describes the research as a ‘trial’.
Intervention 2: Invitation letter describes the research as a ‘study’.
Intervention 3: Invitation letter describes the research as a ‘project’.

Index Type: Method of Invitation

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator
Randomisation.

Outcome measures
Primary outcomes: Proportion of recipients of the invitation letter who join the study.
Secondary outcomes: Proportion of recruited participants who remain in the study.

Analysis plans
The primary analysis will compare the proportion of participants recruited to the study in the different randomised groups. Secondary analyses will examine retention in the study and the extent of the recruited person’s participation in the study.

References
1. Tudor Smith C, Hickey H, Clarke M, Blazeby J, Williamson P. The trials methodological research agenda: results from a priority setting exercises. Trials 2014; 15: 32.
2. McDonald AM, Knight RC, Campbell MK, Entwistle VA, Grant AM, Cook JA, Elbourne DR, Francis D, Garcia J, Roberts I, Snowdon C. What influences recruitment to randomised controlled trials? A review of trials funded by two UK funding agencies. Trials 2006; 7: 9.
3. Treweek S, Mitchell E, Pitkethly M, Cook J, Kjeldstrøm M, Johansen M, Taskila TK, Sullivan F, Wilson S, Jackson C, Jones R, Lockhart P. Strategies to improve recruitment to randomised controlled trials. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2010; (4): MR000013.

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