

SWAT 96: Unconditional or conditional incentives for initial and follow-up postal questionnaires in a clinical trial

Objective of this SWAT

To evaluate the effect of unconditional versus conditional gift voucher incentives on response rates to initial and repeat mailed questionnaires, reminders sent and questionnaire completeness.

Study area: Follow-up, Retention, Data Quality

Sample type: Patients, Participants

Estimated funding level needed: Unfunded

Background

Mailed questionnaires are widely used in health research [1]. High response rates can help to ensure results are more representative of the population studied. Where repeat questionnaires are mailed, high retention can prevent bias and maintain study statistical power. The offer of monetary incentives (e.g. gift vouchers) almost doubles response rates to mailed questionnaires, and improves retention, compared to no monetary incentives [2,3]. Unconditional monetary incentives can double the odds of response to first questionnaires and increase the odds by more than half to final mailed questionnaires compared to conditional monetary incentives [2]. However, most studies to date were not conducted within clinical trials or healthcare settings and did not report other important outcomes such as reminders sent and questionnaire completeness. One study conducted in a clinical trial context, reporting outcomes at a single time point, found unconditional incentives slightly improved both the response rate and the proportion responding without chasing [4]. It is unclear whether unconditional incentives impact response rates to questionnaires, number of reminders sent and data completeness in longitudinal questionnaire study within a clinical trial. We will test this in this SWAT, which will be embedded in trial of lung cancer screening.

Interventions and comparators

Intervention 1: First and subsequent mailed questionnaires include a £5 gift voucher attached to the questionnaire. Reminders mention the gift voucher that was sent.

Intervention 2: First and subsequent mailed questionnaires include the promise of a £5 gift voucher for returning a completed questionnaire. Reminders mention the availability of the gift voucher.

Index Type: Incentive

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator

Randomisation

Outcome measures

Primary: Proportion of questionnaires sent that are received at the research office at each time point.

Secondary: Proportion of questionnaires sent that need a reminder to be sent (i.e. questionnaire not received back by two weeks after mailing) at each time point; proportion of questionnaires received with more than 50% data missing in at least one section at each time point.

Analysis plans

Random effects logistic regression will be used for each outcome. Data has a two-level hierarchical structure with repeated measures clustered within participants. Models adjusted for host trial group, source region and host trial minimisation variables. Differences in outcomes over time between groups assessed by adding time x group interaction terms to models.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAT

This SWAT has been submitted to the repository retrospectively.

References

1. Marcano Belisario JS, Jamsek J, Huckvale K, et al. Comparison of self-administered survey questionnaire responses collected using mobile apps versus other methods. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2015;(7):MR000042.

2. 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.
3. Brueton VC, Tierney J, Stenning S, et al. Strategies to improve retention in randomised trials. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2013; (12):MR000032.
4. Gates S, Williams MA, Withers E, et al. Does a monetary incentive improve the response to a postal questionnaire in a randomised controlled trial? The MINT incentive study. Trials 2009;10:44.

Publications or presentations of this SWAT design

Young B, Bedford L, das Nair R, Gallant S, Littleford R, Robertson JFR, Schembri S, Sullivan FM, Vedhara K, Kendrick D.

Unconditional and conditional monetary incentives to increase response to mailed questionnaires: a randomised controlled study within a trial (SWAT). Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice. 2019, In press.

Examples of the implementation of this SWAT

None

People to show as the source of this idea: Laura Bedford, Ben Young, Denise Kendrick, Kavita Vedhara, Stephanie Gallant. Other members of the group include Roshan das Nair, John Robertson, Stuart Schembri, Frank Sullivan, Roberta Littleford.

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Revisions made by:

Date of revisions: