Adaptive designs CONSORT Extension (ACE) Project

Development of a CONSORT Extension for adaptive clinical trials

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

Adaptive designs offer opportunities to use accumulating trial data to change aspects of an ongoing trial (such as modifying sample size, drop futile arms, or stop the trial for efficacy or futility) while preserving its credibility, validity, and integrity. Well designed and conducted adaptive designs have the potential to offer efficiency in addressing research objectives, as well as value for money, and ethical advantages.

Despite these potential benefits of adaptive designs, there are obstacles hampering their routine use in clinical research. Transparent adequate reporting is one of the key ways in which barriers and concerns to the use of adaptive designs can be overcome. Transparent reporting could enhance the credibility of adaptive designs, help reduce research waste, and improve reproducibility and replicability of adaptive trials. Recent research found inadequate reporting of adaptive trials which may influence their credibility, usefulness to learn from and apply, and to inform future related research.

The aim of this research is to develop a consensus driven reporting guidance tailored for adaptive randomised controlled trials which assess the efficacy and effectiveness of human investigative interventions. This will be an extension to the existing CONSORT guidance for randomised controlled trials and will be applicable across trial phases (such as Phases 2, 3 and 4 trials).

We are asking you to take part in Delphi surveys in order to identify the key items that need to be included in the CONSORT extension guidance that is being developed.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you have been identified in your role as a clinical trials researcher who have used or interested in using adaptive designs, developer of adaptive designs methods, consumer of results from adaptive designs, beneficiary or user of the resultant guidance document such as journal editors, assessor of quality of evidence from adaptive designs such as systematic reviewers, regulatory assessor or commissioner of research grants. You may have been identified through your professional networks, from suggestions from other individuals involved in the research, or research publications.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part and you can withdraw at any time. If you do decide to take part you will be sent a link to the Delphi survey and you will be asked to provide consent when accessing the survey online, you can still withdraw at any point during the survey, though data that you contribute will be kept up to the point of withdrawal.

What do I have to do?

Registration:

If you are interested in taking part, please register using this link [link to be added] and the University of Oxford will then have your details so that they can send you a unique link to the survey. On registration, you will be asked to provide consent and provide some basic details including your contact details, your experience in clinical trials and adaptive designs (there is no pre-requisite for experience), and you will be asked to identify with a stakeholder group which most describes you.

The stakeholder group will then be categorised as either: [e.g. clinical trials researcher or user of clinical trials research – to be decided during piloting].

The registration link can also be found in the email, on our project page, or you can contact us (emails below) to request it.

Delphi survey participation:

The University of Oxford will send you a link to the survey once it is live. The survey will not take more than half an hour of your time and will be open for completion for three weeks. You may be sent up to four reminders to complete the survey while it is open.

The Delphi process has a number of rounds, and you can take part in any number of the rounds. The first round will ask you to rate the importance of each item presented. In round two, you will be presented with the outcome for your stakeholder category and overall outcome alongside each item, and you will be asked to rate these again. If a third round is decided upon, this will include further information on responses of other stakeholder categories.

The data from the survey will be stored by The University of Oxford during the Delphi process and will be sent in full to the research team in Sheffield after each round. All transfer of data will be encrypted.

Following the Delphi survey we will arrange a consensus meeting to decide on the items to be used in the guidance. We will ask if you are willing to take part in this at registration though we will base the invitations on the stakeholder roles and may not invite everyone that indicates willingness. We will contact you separately at a later date to arrange this.

You will be informed once the Delphi process (all rounds) has been completed.

If you do not want to be invited to further surveys, or to the consensus group meeting please contact the study team and we will not contact you again in regards to this project.

What are the possible disadvantages and advantages of taking part?

We do not envisage any disadvantages of taking part in the Delphi survey, though it may take up no more than two hours if you take part in all three rounds.

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will lead to guidance for the reporting of adaptive clinical trials.

What if something goes wrong?

As the research involves a survey, it is unlikely that anything will go wrong, but if you would like to complain about anything related to the project, please contact Munya Dimairo or Katie Biggs (contacts below). Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction please contact Professor John Brazier (j.e.brazier@sheffield.ac.uk), Dean of the School of Health and Related Research.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications, unless you wish to be acknowledged. Please let us know if you would like your contribution to be acknowledged and you will be acknowledged in related publications but you will not be linked to the data you provide during the research.

Only the lead investigator and project coordinator will have access to identifiable data in the form of your contact details in order to contact you for further Delphi rounds.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The survey data will be used to identify the key items for inclusion in the CONSORT extension guidance and this will be published in a peer reviewed journal and hosted on EQUATOR Network website, MRC HTMR website, and Sheffield CTU website. Further publications may come out of the project and these will be disseminated on the project website - https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/scharr/sections/dts/ctru/aceproject

The anonymised data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) Support funding stream and the MRC hubs.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via ScHARR's Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

Munya Dimairo (lead investigator) - m.dimairo@sheffield.ac.uk
Katie Biggs (project coordinator) – c.e.biggs@sheffield.ac.uk

Please keep a copy of this document for your information. If you take part, you will consent to the project online, please contact us if you would like a copy of the consent information.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.