first contact

Your chance to influence the results!

Your name: ……
email / tel: ……

Introduction

First Contact is a randomised trial of an intensive versus a simple method of approaching authors of study reports in order to retrieve data they have not published. The statistical analysis of the trial will take a Bayesian approach. A Bayesian analysis starts with a prior distribution, which describes uncertainty about the relative effectiveness of the two methods. This is updated as data accumulate to produce a posterior distribution, which combines prior uncertainty with the information in the data. The main analysis will make use of a non-informative prior distribution, that is an expression of prior ignorance. However, we will conduct additional analyses using informative prior distributions based on genuine prior beliefs in order to determine whether the results are sufficiently strong to convince practising reviewers of their worth. We would like to elicit your personal beliefs for use in this analysis. It should only take a few minutes. You can find out more about the protocol for First Contact at http://www.mrc-bsu.cam.ac.uk/firstcontact.

Instructions

You will be asked for your best guesses of a series of 'proportions'. You may prefer to interpret the proportions as probabilities of response, as response rates or as percentages responding. Please ignore the dashed boxes on the right until question (4).
Along with each proportion we ask you for a 'feasible range'. This is the range within which you are pretty sure the true proportion lies. This should reflect your uncertainty in the true value of the proportion in an infinitely large sample. It should *not* reflect how much random error you expect. To be precise, the feasible range should give the range of values for which you are 95% certain the truth lies. For example, suppose I believed *a priori* that 50% of the British electorate would participate in a particular postal referendum, but I was uncertain and I thought that as few as 15% or as many as 75% might respond. Then my best guess would be 50% and my feasible range would be from 15% to 75%.

Elicitation

Imagine a very large trial with the same protocol as First Contact.

(1) Consider first the **control group**. Investigators (authors of studies) assigned to the control group receive a single, simple letter requesting the missing data. This is usually sent to the contact address listed in the published paper.
From what proportion of investigators would you expect *any response* within 12 weeks (including, for example, a note to say the investigator had deceased)? (*Satisfactory response*)
Best guess: ☐ Feasible range: from ☐ to ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

(2) Now *imagine your best guess were the absolute truth* for investigators in the control group.
The **experimental group** receives an intensive intervention involving pre-notification, additional information, possible incentives and active follow-up.
From what proportion of investigators would you expect *any response* within 12 weeks?
Best guess: ☐ Feasible range: from ☐ to ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

(3a) Now imagine the true response rate in the control group is **20%**. In the experimental group, from what proportion of investigators would you expect any response within 12 weeks?
Best guess: ☐ Feasible range: from ☐ to ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

(3b) Now imagine the true response rate in the control group is **50%**. In the experimental group, from what proportion of investigators would you expect *any response* within 12 weeks?
Best guess: ☐ Feasible range: from ☐ to ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

(3c) Now imagine the true response rate in the control group is **80%**. In the experimental group, from what proportion of investigators would you expect *any response* within 12 weeks?
Best guess: ☐ Feasible range: from ☐ to ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

(4) Now think about the alternative outcome of *satisfactory response*. This is a response that yields sufficient new data to include the trial in the review with no important gaps. Please fill in equivalent responses to questions (1) to (3) in the dashed boxes to the right.

Thank you for your help. Please return this form to Julian Higgins at MRC Biostatistics Unit, Institute of Public Health, University Forvie Site, Robinson Way, Cambridge CB2 2SR, England, or by fax on +44 1223 330388