A Survey of Adherence to the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) Guidelines for Abstracts

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ABSTRACT

Background: In 1996, the CONSORT group published a checklist of essential items to improve the clarity and completeness of reports of randomized controlled trials (RCTs). These recommendations are endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The CONSORT 2010 Statement was first published in 2010, with revisions published in 2012, 2010, and 2004. This statement was established by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).

Objective: The CONSORT criteria are recommended by more than 150 journals as a standard for reporting all RCTs. However, studies have shown that abstracts reporting RCTs in journals do not always report the essential items outlined in the CONSORT statement. The CONSORT group, in collaboration with ICMJE, has recently reviewed the CONSORT checklist to ensure that each item is clearly comprehensible and essential for meta-analysis purposes.

Methods: We conducted a survey of abstracts reporting RCTs in the 15 journals that endorse the CONSORT guidelines. From January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2009, we retrieved articles reporting RCTs in these 15 journals. Each of the abstracts was checked for compliance with the CONSORT checklist. The CONSORT checklist is divided into 9 items: 'Methods', 'Interventions', 'Blinding (masking)', 'Randomization', 'Recruitment', 'Trial status', 'Outcome', 'Numbers analyzed', and 'Conclusion'.

RESULTS

Abstract Selection

We selected 93 CONSORT member journals and 16 English-language psychiatric journals from those listed on the ICMJE website and 9 items that are not included on this website.

Search Strategy

We searched PubMed for RCTs published in 2009 in these 15 journals. As the CONSORT statement is endorsed by ICMJE member journals, we retrieved 444 published articles reporting RCTs in 14 of the 15 journals.

Identification of the study as ‘randomized’

No statistical analyses were preplanned or conducted and the results are presented as descriptive.

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Numbers analyzed

None of the 93 abstracts from the 14 journals included all essential items necessary for meta-analysis. Hence, in 2008 the CONSORT group extended the CONSORT criteria for abstracts reporting RCTs.

Conclusion

The data were identified as randomized in 100% of the abstracts in the 14 journals.

CONCLUSIONS

Although two years have elapsed since the CONSORT guidelines for abstracts were introduced, the number of journals that do not endorses the CONSORT guidelines has not changed.

REFERENCES