Estimating Site Performance (ESP): can trial managers predict recruitment success at trial sites? An exploratory study

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INTRODUCTION

Multicentre trials provide key evidence underpinning healthcare practice. They are also hard work, and generally expensive. Some work and expense is devoted to sites that under-recruit. Simple methods to identify sites that will recruit to target would be helpful.

The ESP project asked trial managers (TMs) to predict which sites would recruit to target, and why.

METHODS

Participants
- Trial Managers in the Centre for Healthcare Randomised Trials, Aberdeen, setting up recruitment sites.
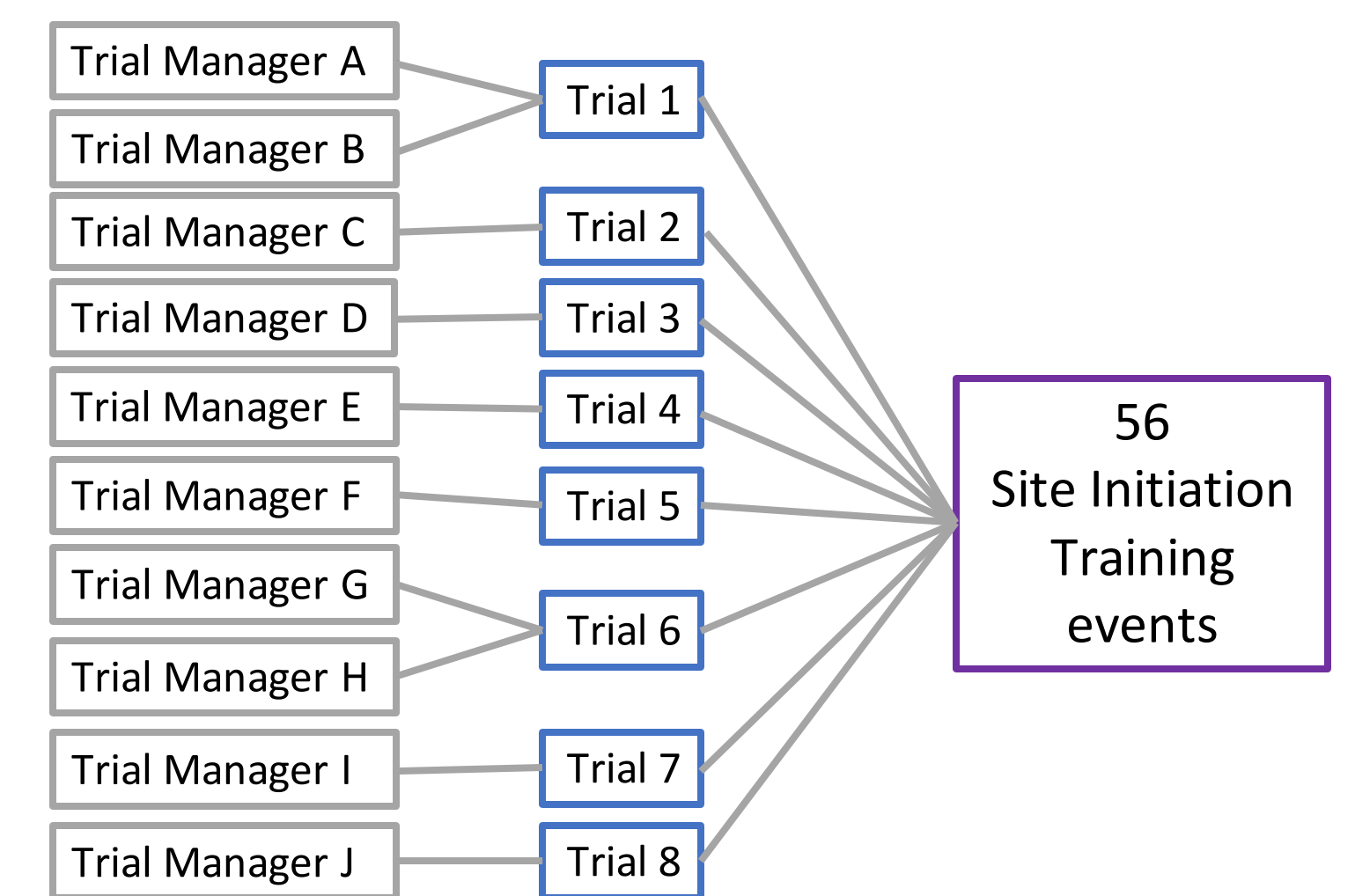
Data collection
- Predictions were made after Site Initiation Training – will the site meet or not meet recruitment target, and the reason for this prediction (free text).
- Collected the number of actual recruits at recruitment sites after a minimum of 8 months recruitment at that site.
- Trial Managers participated in a group discussion of their predictions and the actual recruitment.

Analysis
- Compared pro-rata recruitment targets and actual recruitment to identify whether trial managers could predict sites that would meet or not meet their recruitment targets.
- Identified "red flags" in relation to sites that did not meet recruitment targets.

RESULTS

- 10 Trial Managers working across 7 RCTs and 1 non-randomised study

- Trial managers correctly identified 65% of sites that met their recruitment target and 54% of those that did not.

- Eight 'red flags' for recruitment failure were identified:

'Red Flags'	
Previous poor site performance	The trial protocol and/or its implementation at site
Slow/non-standard approval process	Lack of engagement of site team
Strong staff/patient preferences	Lack of research experience of site staff
Site recruitment target	Busy site staff

DISCUSSION

Using the unguided prediction model from ESP we have developed a modified guided prediction tool based around the red flags. We expect this to improve the accuracy of predictions but this needs evaluation.

You can help us evaluate this tool in a large evaluation (ESP2)

The ESP project has been published: https://trialsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13063-019-3287-6

Are you setting up new trial recruitment sites?

If you are, ESP2 needs you!

The Estimating Site Performance–2 project (ESP2) aims to test a tool that might identify which sites are likely to fail to recruit as planned.

The project is led by trial managers based at the University of Aberdeen, UK and asks trial managers and anyone else responsible for opening trial recruitment sites to make predictions about site recruitment after considering eight 'red flags' identified in the exploratory study described above.

The UK Trial Managers' Network (UKTMN; www.tmn.ac.uk) has partnered with Trial Forge (www.trialforge.org) to support ESP2.

ESP2 needs 1000 recruitment predictions from across the world. You can make predictions through a web-based system and the ESP2 team will contact you 6 and 12 months later to see how recruitment is going.

TRIAL FORGE Join in, find out more about ESP2 and sign up at: **bit.ly/Recruitment_ESP2** (https://w3.abdn.ac.uk/hsru/ESP2) or email us on **ESP2@abdn.ac.uk**

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