Supplementary Material

Qualitative recruitment investigation

Interview schedule: Total Ankle Replacement Versus Arthrodesis (TARVA) trial recruiters

Recruitment pathway
- How are patients recruited into this randomized controlled trial (RCT)? Is there a "recruitment" appointment?
- How do you find out which patients to approach about the RCT?

Introducing/explaining the trial
- How do you introduce/explain the trial to patients?
- What is involved in taking part in this RCT; and in each arm?
- What happens to patients if they agree to take part?

Informed consent
- How easy do you think it is to obtain fully informed consent for patients participating in this RCT? (Probe: what is informed consent; how do you know when you have reached it?)
- Are you ever concerned about the possibility of coercing patients into taking part in the trial?

Treatment preferences of patients
- Do patients express preferences for particular treatments?
- (Probe – what are their preferences; do you know why they express preferences?)
- What do you do when a patient expresses a preference?
- (Probe – do you accept it – what happens next? Or do you ever explore or challenge their preference?)
- What other reasons (not preferences) have patients given for not taking part in this RCT?

Randomization
- How do you explain to patients how the decision is made in the trial about which treatment they will receive?
- How easy do you think the concept of randomisation is for patients to understand?
  Note: *If this seems threatening, acknowledge that this is a difficult and confusing concept for everybody and then explore again.*

Uncertainty
- How do you describe the uncertainty?
- How do you feel about explaining uncertainty?
- Do you ever have a feeling during an appointment that a patient should really have one treatment rather than another? Probe: Why? What do you do about that?

Difficulties during recruitment
- What would you say are the main difficulties you face as a recruiter?
- Can you describe specific examples of 'good' and 'bad' recruitment experiences?
- Are there difficulties with any particular arm?
- Do you think this RCT is the right thing for these patients?

Personal views

- Do you think your work as a recruiter is similar or different from your usual work/practice? Probe: In what ways it is (a) similar, (b) different?
- Do you know (or have a hunch) about what the outcome of the RCT will be?
- If you were a patient in this position today, would you agree to be recruited to the RCT and be randomized? Or would you choose a treatment? Which one?

Finally - improving recruitment

- What might, in your opinion, improve the recruitment appointments?
- Do you think you (or others) need more support or training?