Patient perspectives about participation in a chronic rhinosinusitis trial during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study

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This paper explores the views of patients participating in the MACRO Trial during the COVID-19 pandemic and their opinions of how the continuation of trial during pandemic can be improved. 19 participants from 5 of the 15 recruiting sites were interviewed by telephone between December 2020 and February 2021 and included patients from all treatment groups (sinus surgery, antibiotic, placebo) and the range of ages and gender. The conversations during interview were simultaneously transcribed, coded, and common themes were picked up.

The interview was broken into three main parts: the patients’ individual experiences with regards to their trial participation during pandemic, their safety concerns regarding trial participation during the pandemic and suggestion on how the trial could restart safely during pandemic.

There was a mixed opinion with regards to participation during the pandemic, some received good communication, others felt confused and some felt it was understandable not having sufficient communication, as experienced with other services.

The majority of patient concerns about attending trial visits were around transmission of COVID-19 between patients in hospital common areas and waiting rooms while transmission from healthcare professionals was not seen as a cause for concern.

Regarding restarting trial recruitment, most participants felt this could continue with safety measures in place. Suggestions for improving safety included: consideration for changing the clinic location away from hospital to a different site, vaccination, pre-visit information on COVID 19 safety measure in place in hospital and careful management of waiting rooms.

The conclusion of the study was that with such measures in place, there were minimal barriers to restarting recruitment to the MACRO trial from a patient perspective as soon as restrictions allowed, and ENT regained capacity to do so.

Following this feedback, the MACRO team went on to provide revised guidelines and training to the trial team and subsequently successfully reopened recruitment.