Author's response to reviews

Title: Updating a systematic review - what difference did it make? Case study of nicotine replacement therapy

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Version: 3 Date: 1 Oct 2001

Response to referee's comments:

We thank the referee for his helpful and detailed comments, which have helped us to clarify our thinking. Conceptually, we have followed his advice to focus more carefully between systematic reviews and meta-analysis when updating. In general, we have pushed the paper more clearly towards the second of the two options that he suggests (and the one that was our original intention)--i.e. focussing on the practical problems in maintaining and updating systematic reviews. The meta-analytic data is included to illustrate these problems and we acknowledge that study of the statistical issues in cumulative meta-analysis would require a different statistical approach.

Major comments

1) Clinical significance: We acknowledge the validity of the comment. Our response has been to remove the references to clinical significance.

2) As above, we have made revisions throughout the paper to make this distinction much clearer.

3) We did not agree that our concluding section contradicted itself, but we do agree that we addressed two issues (we are less convinced than the referee that they are very different)--they are certainly linked. However, we have changed the section to make it clearer that there are two issues and how they might be related. Although we are not advocating abandonning the Cochrane principle of updating, one objective of the paper is certainly to examine the validity of this principle in a critical way around a specific example. We have altered the text to try to make this clearer.

4) The referee raises an important question here and we have addressed it much more explicitly, in keeping with the overall aim of moving the paper towards a more practical discussion of the problems in updating.

5) We have included tables as suggested by the referee.

6) As above