Reviewer’s report

Title: What is a pilot or feasibility study? A review of current practice and editorial policy

Version: 1 Date: 23 June 2010

Reviewer: Shaun Treweek

Reviewer’s report:

General
This is an interesting and well-written paper, which I enjoyed reading. My comments are relatively minor and are listed below under the headings used by Biomed Central.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Methods
I’d like to a few more sentences on the methods used in the various searches. What were the inclusion criteria? In Results it becomes clear that review papers were excluded, for example. How many of the authors checked abstracts, full text etc and agreed that a particular study should be included. And who (and how) were data extracted from included studies? Some of this information is given in the ‘Authors’ contributions’ section but it should also be in Methods.

Discussion
1. The authors say that pilot studies rarely act as a precursor for a bigger study and give some reasons for why this might be so. Do the authors think that authors of pilot studies should say up front what results would mean further work was or was not required? In other words, should they be explicit in defining what would kill a future trial, or necessitate a bigger study?

2. The authors mention the encouraging attitude of funders but, on my reading, it seems that the views of journal editors are less encouraging, especially that given on page 9 about editors mostly not encouraging the publication of pilot studies. It would be interesting to read what the authors think of this given, for example, the encouragement given by funders and the MRC complex intervention guidance for running more exploratory work prior to full-scale trials.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Abstract
1. Page 2, first paragraph. ‘case law’ - I don’t think this is a good term here; I suggest dropping it.
2. Page 3, first paragraph. I found the sentence ‘Twelve studies with sufficient..’ a bit lacking; I guess you need to give an indication of what ‘sufficient’ means for the sentence to make sense.

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
None

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests