Reviewer's report

Title: Methodological reporting of randomized controlled trials in major hepato-gastroenterology journals in 2008 and 1998: a comparative study

Version: 4 Date: 11 May 2011

Reviewer: Agnes Dechartres

Reviewer's report:


Overall comments: the authors have revised the manuscript carefully and responded the comments point by point. As a consequence, the manuscript has improved but there is still some important details to revise.

- Due to the methodology of the paper and the years compared, it cannot be said that the reporting improved after the CONSORT. The CONSORT was first published in 1996 and revised in 2001 and the years compared by the authors are 1998 and 2008. So the authors should be very careful with this. I agree with them that the CONSORT is probably implicated in the improvement but the results do not enable to prove it. For example, I would change the first sentence of the abstract: “it was still unclear whether the methodological reporting quality of RCTs in major hepato-gastroenterology journals improved after the CONSORT was published in 1996 and revised in 2001”. Same concern in the conclusion of the abstract: “which indicate the researchers had increased awareness of and compliance with the CONSORT.” Please add “may”. Same concern page 9 “The CONSORT Statement appeared to have had less effect on reporting of other methodological items.”

- The objective of the authors is better stated. Just, they should say “reporting of methodological items” everywhere.

- I would just compare the results with those of previous studies in the discussion rather than in the results.

- The authors should justify more clearly why they selected the years 1998 (2 years after the first CONSORT) and 2008 (seven years after the revised version of the CONSORT).

- The authors state that they focus on important methodological items based on the Cochrane handbook but sample size calculation is not included in the risk of bias Tool and intent to treat analysis is included in the ‘incomplete outcome data’ domain. The authors can report the results for these items but it should not be stated that these items were those recommended by the Cochrane Collaboration.

- English should be re-read. For example, it should be stated either: adequate, partial, no reporting or adequately, partly, not reported

- The item “selective” reporting is really hard to assess without the protocol or
registration form. How did you process?
- Assessing the reporting of the item “free of other bias” seems not really relevant because this item is very difficult to assess.
- In the data analysis section, please delete “with the mantel-Haenszel method” because this method is used to combine risk ratios together (in a meta-analysis).
- In the results section, don’t detail the selection process in the text because the Figure is here to provide details. Same concern for the general characteristics. State that the general characteristics of the RCTs are reported in Table 1 and just focus on the main differences.
- For the reporting of methodological items, I don’t agree with the presentation neither in the text nor in the table. You should not present RR for adequately, partly, not reported but rather RR for adequately/partly versus no or adequately versus no or partly between 1998 and 2008. You can also mention some percentages in the text because after you say that despite improvement the reporting is insufficient.
- Please delete the sentence “Previous studies showed that nonrandomized trials yielded larger estimates....”
- Please be careful in the discussion regarding the interpretation of your results especially p 13 “which indicated that the other 4 journals had worse reporting of this item than hepatology” and regarding the difference between public and industry funding. I would be much more cautious and tried to find relevant articles to explain these results.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

no competing interest