Reviewer's report

Title: The assessment of the quality of reporting of meta-analyses in diagnostic research: a systematic review.

Version: 2 Date: 30 March 2011

Reviewer: Erik von Elm

Reviewer's report:

In response to major compulsory revision points:

1) to 1: The authors have added a paragraph to the Discussion section justifying their definition of a meta-analysis for use as inclusion criteria. Using stringent criteria is fine but the problem is their association with the study’s main outcome, i.e. reporting quality. The newly added paragraph on limitations does not address this. In the selection process, step 3 requires mention of electronic databases in the original review paper, which reflects PRISMA item 7. Unsurprisingly, all but one of the 236 included reviews have a score of 1 for this PRISMA item as shown in Table 1. The same is true for Step 4 on search terms (reflecting PRISMA item 8) and Step 5 on inclusion criteria (reflecting PRISMA item 6) with high rates of full or partial compliance. None of the 236 reviews were found non-compliant with these three items which is obvious given that these were required for eligibility. It is probable that this leads to substantial overestimation of the estimates for reporting quality in the present analysis. It also explains why, for item 7, the RR is near 1 with a very small 95%CI.

2) to 3: minor error in the new Figure 6: For item 3 the 95%CI of 0.97 to 1.04 does not correspond to the horizontal bar on the right side.

In response to minor compulsory revision points:

3) to 3: The new text on page 9/10 describing the comparison of the time periods does not make transparent whether the choice of cut-off between 2004 and 2005 was pre-specified before the analysis. In order to achieve equal durations (rationale provided in text), other cut-offs (e.g. 1999-2003 and 2004-2008) would have been possible with the advantage of including more of the 236 reviews.

4) to 6: If there was no lower limit in the searches, it still remains unclear why 17 of 236 studies (7.2%) published until the end of the year 2000 were excluded in the comparison of time periods (according to numbers provided on page 13/14). This exclusion is not justified in the text. It needs to be clearly stated in Abstract and Results section. Instead there is mention of “over 95% (225 meta-analyses) (...) published after the year 2000” (pages 3 + 11) But this is not helpful if these numbers do not correspond to the cut-off time point chosen.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
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