Reviewer's report

Title: The Global Evidence Mapping Initiative: Scoping research in broad topic areas

Version: 1 Date: 19 August 2010

Reviewer: David Katz

Reviewer's report:

This is a clear, well-organized paper that both helps make the case for evidence mapping, and highlights key enhancements to previously published methods. It represents a meaningful contribution to the fields of both evidence review methodology, and the specific study of traumatic brain and spinal cord injury.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:

None

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

1) the abstract includes a 'results' section, but this provides a very limited representation of the results of the mapping exercise, which apparently includes the identification and brief abstraction of a large sample of papers; the establishment of a website to place the maps in question in the public domain; etc. A more accurate depiction of the actual results of the mapping exercise would enhance the abstract, and the paper overall.

2) the utility of the maps is characterized in hypothetical terms only; it would be useful to know whether or not any of the intended uses of the maps has been made, or is planned at this time. Are there research projects undertaken, or abandoned, because of the guidance provided by the evidence maps? Have funds been shifted, or clinical decisions altered? The case for real-world utility is best made with a demonstration of real-world application.

3) the limitations of evidence-mapping might be more fully addressed. one important one: in the absence of a thorough assessment of study quality, it can be difficult to differentiate between a topic that has been studied extensively but ineffectively (i.e., efficacy is still unknown due to methodologic limitations) versus a topic that has not been studied at all. Both are situations that warrant more research of the topic, assuming it has intrinsic importance- but they look very different superficially upon review of an evidence map. Have the authors considered the potential for this aspect of mapping to be misleading? Can they suggest ways to avoid this hazard?

4) there are occasional word omissions throughout (e.g., introduction, line 2, should read "...'that' are narrowly focused"; p. 12, #3 should read "...'of' all codes"), and the word 'data' is not consistently dealt with as a plural (i.e., 'data
are,' not 'data is...')

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

None

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

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

**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.