Reviewer's report

Title: An optimal search filter for retrieving systematic reviews and meta-analyses that evaluate the effectiveness of public health interventions

Version: 1  Date: 1 October 2011

Reviewer: Andrew Booth

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The authors use an indirect style which makes it difficult to follow their line of argument. Examples include:

"Finally, summary statements for reviews of good methodological quality are being written to summarize the key findings and provide recommendations for policy and practice".

Prefer:

"Evidence.ca team members write summary statements for reviews of good methodological quality to summarize the key findings and provide recommendations for policy and practice".

"In addition, knowing what is relevant to public health and health promotion practitioners presents its own challenge, given that it is a dynamic field characterized by a wide scope of practice, defined regionally and constantly changing".

Prefer:

"A further challenge is how to know what is relevant to public health and health promotion practitioners, given that it is a dynamic field characterized by a wide scope of practice, defined regionally and constantly changing".

"To ensure health-evidence.ca remains a comprehensive database of relevant articles, retrieving every potentially-relevant systematic review is of the utmost importance".

Prefer:

"It is of the utmost importance to retrieve every potentially-relevant systematic review if health-evidence.ca is to remain a comprehensive database of relevant articles"

"In comparing initially the SR and PH search filters and then the SR search filter to other systematic review search filters, the following four indices were used to evaluate filter performance: sensitivity, specificity, precision and “number needed to read (NNR)”.

Prefer:

"Four indices were used to evaluate filter performance by comparing initially the
SR and PH search filters and then the SR search filter with other systematic review search filters: sensitivity, specificity, precision and “number needed to read (NNR)

2. "700,00" - missing digit(s)

3. "Furthermore, while descriptions of these search filters had been published, databases such as MEDLINE had not incorporated the use of these filters within their search functions". - I am not sure that this is true given that PubMed has the Clinical Queries feature, including a systematic review filter, doesn't Ovid also have a built-in reviews filter?

4. Split long sentences into shorter sentences:
   e.g.
   "In addition to being sensitive, the SR search filter demonstrated a slightly higher degree of specificity than the PH search filter in MEDLINE (98.9 vs. 96.0), and was nearly the same for EMBASE (98.2 vs 97.9), and CINAHL (97.6 vs 98.2), meaning that while the SR filter did a better job of screening out non-relevant articles in MEDLINE, it was comparable to the PH search filter in EMBASE and CINAHL".

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

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'