Reviewer's report

Title: Analysis of decisions made in meta-analyses of depression screening and the risk of "hunch" bias: a case study

Version: 3 Date: 24 April 2012

Reviewer: Ahmad Hazem

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-Major Essential Revisions

The final conclusion remains unchanged. Asking authors to declare "strongly held prior beliefs as a priori hypotheses" will prove to be problematic. How to define this strongly held prior belief. Most physicians in practice resort to their medical education, past experience, and certainly literature and guidelines in our attempt to practice the most evidence based medicine. Does this behaviour constitute a strongly held prior belief? Is the fact that I authored a previous paper in that field on the that topic constitute this belief? Am I really fully aware of my "hunch"? How sensitive am I to identifying it?

I will concede that prior beliefs may influence results and hope that this is the exception rather than the rule in our "systematic" methodological investigations. I also must ask the authors to de-emphasize the recommendation to declare strongly held prior beliefs in the conclusion. This is simply too easy to ask, but too complicated to implement. Obviously the usefulness is also questionable, but this is why the issue is raised. I think the identification of "hunch" bias may be a good topic for future research.

The simpler more accessible solution is to compare one's systematic review and meta-analysis to previous literature, and explain discrepancies. This was referred to in the discussion of the revised manuscript.

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