Reviewer’s report

Title: The quality of the evidence base for clinical pathway effectiveness: room for improvement in the design of evaluation trials

Version: 2 Date: 29 February 2012

Reviewer: Ulrich Ronellenfitsch

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for responding to my comments and changing the manuscript accordingly.

I have only one remaining issue:

Minor Essential Revision

My comment regarding heterogeneity in the two subgroups were not meant to preclude you from doing a pooled analysis and presenting the WMDs in the two subgroups. Without providing the WMDs, it is very difficult for you to support your argument of overestimation of CPW effects by studies with poor design. Therefore, I would present the WMDs in the two subgroups, maybe even perform a test for subgroup differences, but explicitly point out that heterogeneity is high and that thus the results need to be taken with caution. The finding of high heterogeneity is no surprise to me, as you pooled studies looking at CPW effects in many different clinical settings (diseases / treatments).

Regarding the appropriateness of a test for subgroup differences, I disagree with you that such an approach is per se wrong. Chapter 9.6.3.1 of the Cochrane Handbook describes in detail how such comparisons can be conducted. Of course it is not sufficient to just compare the significance values of the pooled estimates of the different subgroups, but the test implemented in RevMan is a valid statistical technique.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests