Reviewer's report

Title: Cluster randomised trials in the medical literature

Version: 1 Date: 29 June 2004

Reviewer: Michael Campbell

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This is a fairly limited review of cluster trials, with a hand search of certain years of the BMJ, with a suggestion that the number and quality of analysis of cluster trials has increased.

Main points
1) The author states that his own statistics notes had been cited 121 times. It would be easy to find out which papers cited his work, and I wondered whether these had been included in the survey, although if they were they are likely to be well written!
2) The BMJ has fairly rigorous statistical refereeing, which may mean that the quality is better than in other journals, so generalisation about quality may be premature.
3) P5 l-2 Not strictly true that summary statistic cannot be adjusted for covariates – can adjust using ordinary methods and then use summary statistic of adjusted values.
4) Fig 1 seems to show more than 0 for BMJ papers in 1998, in contrast to Table 2

In places the English is rather casual.

Suggestions
1) Abstract l 5 ‘such’ suggests misleading trials. Replace by ‘cluster randomised’.
2) l-8 replace ‘included’ with ‘contained’
3) P5 l6 ‘articles’
4) P7 l12 need verbs: were ‘about how’... and were about ‘trials themselves’.
5) P8 l2 omit ‘no journal has had more’ (obvious from previous sentence)
6) P8 l6 ‘have shown a similar rise’ => ‘reflect?’
7) P8 l7 ‘these’ unclear . => ‘paper in the BMJ’
8) P8 l2 ‘that’=> ‘than’ (or ‘that I had failed to find’)
9) P10 l6-7 clarify ‘both’