Reviewer's report

Title: No role for quality scores in systematic reviews of diagnostic accuracy studies

Version: 1 Date: 4 April 2005

Reviewer: George Swingler

Reviewer's report:

General
This study addresses a topical and important aspect in the systematic reviewing of studies of diagnostic accuracy. It is well written, the question is clear and well-defined, appropriate methods are used and the study is clearly reported in sufficient detail. The title and abstract accurately convey what has been found. The Discussion and Conclusions are generally well-balanced. The authors may however wish to reconsider some issues of emphasis in the Discussion.

None

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
None

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

A difficulty in assessing the validity of different scoring systems is the lack of a credible reference standard against which to compare. A lack of agreement between different scoring systems is not surprising, and does not necessarily invalidate all the scoring systems. The authors may wish to address this issue in the Discussion.

If the results of a quality assessment are incorporated into a systematic review, and more than one quality item is included, some sort of composite assessment appears necessary. The authors do not clarify what they mean in the Conclusion by "..investigation of the association of individual quality items with estimates of diagnostic accuracy..". Are they referring to the use of a single quality item (if so, which one?), or what form of composite assessment is recommended?

The authors acknowledge the wide confidence intervals around estimates but may overstate apparent differences between point estimates, given the uncertainty around these estimates.

As noted by the authors, much of the variation between scores is due to scoring scheme 2, which incorporates the quality of reporting. An appraisal of the differences between scores once reporting quality has been discounted may be helpful.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests