Reviewer's report

Title: Effectiveness of different databases in identifying studies for systematic reviews: experience from the WHO systematic review of maternal morbidity and mortality

Version: 2  Date: 4 January 2005

Reviewer: Arminee Kazanjian

Reviewer's report:

General

Revisions identified in the Response to my comments have provided appreciable clarification to understanding the purpose and scope of this study. That RCT's were included, and that the study did not seek to compare electronic vs non-electronic media clarifies the scope of the study. I note that the numbers in the Table and text have been revised slightly, presumably to reflect clearer categories. It would have been more helpful to have three classifications, instead of the two currently used (well-known electronic, and other): well-known electronic, lesser known electronic, non-electronic. For example, LILACS, BIOSIS, etc. are variously discussed along the well-known electronic databases in the mainstream (i.e. well-known) as well as alluded to be "Other". I realize the problems associated with the functionality of the regional/local indices.

The authors indicate that they have added more discussion on the importance of retrieving data from developing countries; the Discussion in my revised manuscript is verbatim the same as the original submission.

I disagree with the response that statistical significance is unimportant for this paper because it does not compare two projects. The work to which I had referred as an example, did not compare sensitivity and precision between projects. Chi-square analyses of statistical significance could be applied to test differences in proportions (due to chance).

I am still unclear of what constituted the "gold standard" for establishing effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the revisions have much improved the paper, to be accepted for publication

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: Yes

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