Reviewer's report

Title: Methodological quality of systematic reviews of animal studies: a survey of reviews of basic research.

Version: 2 Date: 9 January 2006

Reviewer: Maria Ospina

Reviewer's report:

General
The review question is very relevant to the field; it is clear and explicitly stated. It emphasized the importance of exploring the quality of systematic reviews of animal studies, and the impact that this evidence may have to rationalize research in human subjects. The manuscript is clearly written in a concise manner.

The search methods were comprehensive enough to locate studies relevant for the review. Appropriate databases were selected to identify the studies, and other potentially important sources were explored. The potential for publication bias was correctly addressed under the Discussion section. The inclusion criteria and study selection process was well documented. The methods of quality assessment are explicit, and the rationale for selecting a quality checklist over other methods available for evaluation of systematic reviews of human studies can be arguable, but the decision was documented and discussed.

The review methods were documented in such a way that the work can be replicated by other reviewers. It also allows the review methods used to be subject to appraisal.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None
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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Ideally, the review process should involve independent assessment of studies relevance and quality. Please, clarify how many reviewers assessed the quality of the studies. When the authors said (Page 6) “One of us (LM) extracted data from the identified papers and a second reviewer (KSK) checked them for errors”, does it mean also that LM conducted QA and the QA results were verified by KSK?.
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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The authors presented both limitations and strengths of their research. I think it is important to highlight how their findings compare to reviews of research in humans, but I still consider that the reporting of p values for the indirect comparison between the results presented here and those from Jadad et al 1998 (e.g. p values for differences in proportions) is inappropriate as different methods (study selection, quality assessment of SRs) were used in the study reported here and the Jadad overview. I would suggest to mention how their findings compare to the Jadad overview, but avoid using the p values.
What next?: Accept after minor essential 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