Reviewer's report

Title: An alternative to the hand searching gold standard: Validating methodological search filters using relative recall

Version: 2 Date: 3 April 2006

Reviewer: Pamela Royle

Reviewer's report:

1) In Paragraph 5 of the Background the authors state that: 'The overall time and cost of doing a review is dependent on the size of initial bibliographic retrieval ..'. I think this is perhaps a bit strong - as there are a number of other factors that influence the time and cost of doing a review - maybe modify to 'is one of the key factors ..' or something similar.

2) In the Results paragraph 3 - think there is a typo - should the word be 'comprehensive' and not 'compressive'?

3) The Results section you state that although all specified RCT or quasi-RCT as an inclusion criteria, a number included other controlled clinical trials. It would be interesting, if you have the data, to include some mention of what these other study designs were and were they confined to one review only? Maybe something in the Discussion would be interesting? Do reviewers misclassify RCTs - or are there other reasons for using non-RCT studies, when Methods specify otherwise.

4) It would be interesting to know what the study designs of the 34 MEDLINE articles missed by HSSS(123) were. (Where they really RCTs or CCTs? If not, then the fact that they were missed is not really a failure of the search filter). If they are RCTs or CCTs, were there any methodological search terms that would have retrieved them?

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