Author's response to reviews

Title: Conducting a critical interpretive review of the literature on access to healthcare by vulnerable groups

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Author's response to reviews: see over
We thank the referees for their very useful comments.

**Referee 1:**

Referee 1 raised no substantive points. We have sorted out the references as suggested.

**Referee 2:**

1(a) Whether we are proposing a new method of synthesis or something broader that also includes the stages preceding the synthesis.

We have now made it more explicit that we are proposing a new approach to review. We have also made it more clear (in the Discussion and passim) that Critical Interpretive Synthesis does not see the processes of development of the review question, searching, screening, data extraction, and critical appraisal as necessarily preceding the synthesis stage, as the referee suggests. Instead CIS sees these processes as iterative, interactive, and dynamic, not as a series of predefined stages. Indeed, this approach is a feature of CIS that most distinguishes it from other current approaches to review.

1(b) How we refined traditional techniques

We believe that we have provided as full as account as is possible within a reasonable word count of the kinds of principles that we used in developing CIS. We have made it more clear that we did not see ourselves as “refining” traditional techniques, but as being sensitised to the kinds of methodological issues that reviewers need to address and as drawing on a tradition of qualitative inquiry.

1(c) Whether a reader could go away and consider carrying out a CIS or appreciate what it has to offer over a conventional systematic review, an interpretive review or a traditional narrative review.

We agree that it would be very ambitious to assume that someone could carry out a study using a new method on the basis of a single journal article describing the development of the method, and that was not our intention in writing the paper. We have now made it more explicit what our approach has to offer over other approaches.

2. Whether providing a summary of the results of the review steps over the boundary between a methodology article and a report of a review

We have been advised by the editor that the approach we have used falls within the scope of the journal.

3. Whether the new methodology draws on the strengths of conventional systematic review methodology
We have now made it more explicit that CIS draws on conventional systematic review methodology by being sensitised to the range of methodological issues that need to be addressed.

4. Narrow conceptualisation of conventional systematic review and whether the differences between conventional systematic review and what the authors propose may not be so large.

We disagree that we have used a narrow conceptualisation. We have used the standard and routinely accepted account of what a systematic review involves. We are well aware of some newer approaches to conducting systematic reviews, such as those being developed by the EPPI centre, but these have not yet entered the mainstream (as evidenced for example by citations). We have now offered (in the Introduction and Discussion) a fuller account of how CIS might be distinguished from other approaches that have attempted to deal with issues such as how qualitative and quantitative research might be combined in a review.

5. Minor corrections

We have made these.

Referee 3:

1. Enough detail on what’s happening in this approach.

We have further expanded our discussion the principles and techniques that lie behind the CIS approach.

2. Results

The instructions to authors states that this section must be entitled “Results” so we have been unable to act on the suggestion that we retitle this “Findings”. We have tried to tone down the sociological “feel” of this section, but assure the referee that we do plan to publish the findings in more detail separately. The short account presented here is to illustrate the potential of the CIS approach.

3. Inclusion of a figure

We have struggled to produce a figure that would capture the dynamic nature of the process we propose here. However, we have improved Box 2 and feel that this addresses the concern of the referee.