Reviewer’s report

Title: Abstracts in high profile journals often fail to report harm.

Version: 2 Date: 18 December 2007

Reviewer: Anne-Marie Bagnall

Reviewer’s report:

This is a very interesting paper but I feel that the results should be explored/explained in more detail.

Major compulsory revisions

1. The fourth paragraph of the Results section appears to contradict the third paragraph. In the third paragraph it is stated that 75.9% of articles reported harm in the abstract where statistically significant harm was reported in the text, while only 53.5% of articles reported harm in the abstract where any harm was reported in the text. This seems to suggest that articles are more likely to report harm in the abstract if statistically significant harm is reported in the text, than if any harm is reported in the text.

However, in the fourth paragraph it is stated that the relationship between reporting harm in the text and in the abstract was stronger than that relationship between reporting statistically significant harm in the text and reporting harm in the abstract. I am no expert on statistics so I’m not saying that this result is wrong but I would like the authors to explain what these two results mean in relation to one another. I suspect that other readers of the paper may also be confused. Perhaps if more details of the results were given as well as more explanation the paper would be accessible to more people.

2. In the first paragraph of the Discussion it is stated that 54% of studies that documented harm in the body of the report failed to report harm in the abstract. In the Results section, it is stated that 54% of studies that reported harm in the text DID report harm in the abstract.

Minor essential revisions

These are mostly spelling, grammar and/or typos:

3. Methods, 4th line, change 'selected taking into account both their..' to 'selected based on their...' unless another factor in addition to impact factor was used (but this is not stated in the text or in Figure 1)

4. Methods, 8th line from the end change 'articles regarding the inclusion criteria’ to 'articles with regard to the inclusion criteria'

5. Methods, 6th line from the end, change 'The disagreement...' to 'Disagreement'
6. Discussion, last line on page 6, delete 'resulted'

7. Discussion, first line page 7 insert 'significant' between 'statistically' and 'effects'

8. Discussion, page 7, 2nd para, 5th line, change 'longer sample size' to 'larger sample size'

Discretionary revisions

9. Background, 1st para, line 5 instead of 'i.e.' could it be 'e.g.' as drug companies are not the only authors who may have conflicts of interest

10. Methods, 2nd line, change 'Population and Setting' to 'Study Selection' as this seems a more accurate description of what follows?

11. Methods, 7 lines from the bottom, I'm not sure exactly what is meant by 'number of branches'? If it means number of comparisons it would be better to say that I think. Looking at the number of 'branches' compared to teh number of studies I think this must be what it means as if it meant the number of treatment arms there would be at least twice as many branches as studies

12. Results, paragraph 3. I'm not sure why confidence intervals are reported for the number of abstracts when converted into percentages, as I don't think there should be any uncertainty or variance associated with these numbers, as they are just simple counts?

13. Discussion, paragraph 3. It is stated that being funded by an industry favoured harm being reported in the abstract. Is this harm associated with the intervention or is it asociated with the control group? How has harm been defined? It would be good to see more details about this.

14. In the implications section it would be useful to mention any implicatons for systematic reviews.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

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