Reviewer's report

Title: Assessment of the risk of bias in studies in Cochrane reviews

Version: 1 Date: 4 December 2007

Reviewer: joel gagnier

Reviewer's report:

Discretionary Revisions:
none

Minor Essential Revisions:
1. The statement in the discussion that â##The Jadad scale is the only scale that has been developed using established standards for scales.â## Is not an accurate statement. In fact, an additional scale was developed using accepted scale development techniques (Verhagen AP, de Vet HCW, de Bie RA, et al. The Delphi list: A criteria list for quality assessment of randomized clinical trials developed by Delphi consensus). Please make a note of this.

2. There is an underlying inference in this paper: That reviewers of Cochrane Reviews follow review group guidelines. This inference is likely wrong for many reasons: different questions being asked, heterogeneous reviewer training or expertise, the accumulation of evidence over time, the paucity of evidence on most research on bias, the support given by the various review groups to the reviewer etc. There is empirical evidence that reviewers do not follow the review Group recommendations, generally. Therefore, the jump from review group recommendations to what is actually used by reviewers is large and not warranted. This must be noted with much more clarity in the discussion in this paper.

3. The authors state in the second full paragraph on page 9, in the second last sentence that â##concealment of allocationâ#..is the most important safeguard against biasâ##. I think this statement may be a bit strong. While this item has the most empirical evidence thus far, other items are likely just as important, even though there is only a small amount of empirical evidence on them as of yet. For example, it is very easy to imagine that compliance with the intervention in trials to have an effect on summary treatment effects that is as large or larger than for allocation concealment. That is, if a selection of patients does not take the active treatment medication/intervention (for example) 50% percent of the time, we would expect a rather large influence on the summary effect.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests. I feel it is necessary to note that I am a Cochrane reviewer and have produced a cochrane review under the Cochrane Back Review Group and am currently working on an update of two reviews in the Musculoskeletal group.