Reviewer's report

Title: Disagreement in primary study selection between systematic reviews on negative pressure wound therapy

Version: 3 Date: 7 February 2008

Reviewer: Sally Bell-Syer

Reviewer's report:

Overall comment:
This paper follows on from an excellent and interesting article concerning published / unpublished data in the field of negative pressure wound therapy (NPWT). However this paper gives the impression of "data trawling" and is less focussed.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The Background to the paper concentrates almost exclusively on NPWT whereas the focus of the review appears to be the disagreement in primary study selection between different systematic reviews. There should be more in this section which relates to the subject of systematic reviews and selection of studies rather than the subject of the review itself.

2. The Methods seem to imply that the IQWiG review was the primary source and other sources were identified to fit with this review. The methods outline how the IQWiG review was conducted but as this paper is concerned with the disagreement in primary study selection between different systematic reviews then I would have expected to see more information outlining the criteria of primary study selection against which the different systematic reviews are to be compared. How the reviews are conducted and therefore the studies selected should be presented in the results not the methods.

3. The results state that 10 systematic reviews were identified but only 5 included in this analysis due to the date restrictions imposed by the authors "I am not clear why these date restrictions are required if the comparison is one of the method of primary study selection.

4. It is interesting to read of the differences in selection but this is presented from the viewpoint of the IQWiG review. Were there any attempts by the authors to contact the other review authors to clarify their selection decisions? This would have given a more balanced picture.

5. The fact that the differences found concerned mainly non RCTs is not particularly surprising since this study design is much less robust and rigorous than RCTs and is usually not as well reported for these reasons. Too much emphasis seems to be placed on non RCT when the science of systematic reviewing appears to be moving very firmly in the direction of considering RCT evidence alone for effectiveness reviews.
What next?: Reject because too small an advance to publish

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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'