Author's response to reviews

Title: The inter-observer agreement of examining pre-school children with acute cough: a nested study.

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PDF covering letter
Dear Iratxe

Many thanks for giving us the opportunity to respond the referee comments. We will address these in turn:

1) Samuel Coenen.

Minor compulsory revisions:

As requested, we have added a little more detail about the clinical assessments and we have uploaded a copy of the data collection form used by observers one (sections G and H, pages 4 and 5) and two (section P, page 9).

Discretionary revisions:

We think the use of kappa and phi statistics is appropriate for all the comparisons presented, as they are describing inter-observer agreement in its broadest sense. We do not think it appropriate to present the accuracy statistics (that is the sensitivity and specificity) for the clinical assessments, as we do not think there is an unequivocal reference standard.

2) Alyn Morice

Discretionary revisions

We agree with the referee here that the agreement between observers who measured temperature with a thermometer is very poor and that this is an important finding from this paper. As discussed in response to referee one regarding the accuracy of clinical findings, we do not think that there is an unequivocal reference standard, so we have not proceeded to present sensitivities, specificities or other accuracy statistics.
Major compulsory revisions

We are grateful that the referee has questioned the important issue of a possible order effect. Although we have used the terms 'observer one and two' and examinations took place within 30 minutes of each other, the assessment order varied between children. This has been clarified in the text in the methods section.

We are also grateful for the other possible explanation for the poor agreement observed, that is the time difference between assessments. We have now added this to the limitations section of the paper.

Finally, we agree that the important question of intra-observer reliability of clinical signs has not been addressed by this study and this has been added to the limitations section. In addition, our concluding remarks include mention of this as an important future research question.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Hay