Reviewer’s report

Title: An evaluation of classification systems for stillbirth

Version: 3 Date: 14 March 2009

Reviewer: Russell Kirby

Reviewer’s report:

The comments below are not classified in terms of major compulsory, minor essential or discretionary revisions. The only ones that might fall in the category of compulsory is that concerning Figure 1 and the text of the results section, and the suggestion for additional statistical analysis regarding the data in Table 2. All the others are fairly minor and the authors can determine which will improve their manuscript.

One primary issue (fairly minor): Table 2 reveals substantial variation in proportion unexplained within team across sites. For example, Team 3 found 15.1% unexplained for CODAC, an amount exceeded for this team only for Wigglesworth. This same team had the lowest proportion unexplained across all teams for Wigglesworth. This reviewer wonders if the authors might consider subjecting this table to a one-way ANOVA test, to see how much of the variance is accounted for by team as opposed to classification system, and if significant, to use Tukey’s HSD or comparable post hoc analysis to see if any teams or classifications are statistically different. If the ANOVA is not significant, this could be briefly noted in the results on this topic. If it is, it will warrant another sentence or two in the discussion.

General comment: this is a much improved manuscript, which now only needs minor edits and updates to be finalized.

Minor edits:

There are many superfluous commas included in sentences throughout. This may result from variations in English language practice in different English-speaking countries. An example, in the abstract on p 2, ‘Nine teams, from 7 countries’ typically in American English would not require a comma. This review does not note all of these instances, but there are some 10-20 other places where similar punctuations occur. There are also many instances of words that would normally be hyphenated in American English. These are noted below only on the first occurrence, so a find/replace command would be helpful to correct them throughout.

The last sentence of the abstract does not encapsulate the major finding and future steps from this manuscript (p 3).

P 4: add ‘nations’ after ‘developing’ in first sentence. Consider changing ‘enabling the’ to ‘predicated on’ in first sentence second para. 4 lines from bottom consider
changing ‘need to’ to ‘must’.

P 5: third sentence first full para, consider rearranging phrases for readability, to ‘for the classification of causes and associated conditions and/or suboptimal care among stillbirths’

P 7: change ‘cross referenced’ to ‘cross-referenced’. Consider changing ‘but to also’ to ‘but also to’. Delete the ‘s’ from ‘classifications’ near middle of page. Put phrase beginning ‘e.g’ and ending ‘meetings’ in parentheses.

P 8: typically postneonatal is a single word.

P 9: last para, add ‘also’ between ‘system, developed’

P 10: under ‘secondary outcome’ since there is only 1, there is no need to number it 1. Delete ‘that of’ and add ‘s’ to ‘procedure’ in next para. Last full sentence change to ‘included: . . . and one team each in Norway . . . ‘ Change last word on page from ‘various’ to ‘varying’

P 11: seventh line, add ‘in their practice’ after ‘used’. Throughout, hyphenate ‘population-based’ and ‘hospital-based’

P 12: delete ‘(classification worksheets)’ at end of first sentence – this is redundant of the information in the next parens.

P 14: as now written, all of the information in Fig 1 is also reported in the text. Therefore, Fig 1 can now be deleted. Also, the material referenced as ‘Figure 2’ in next to last sentence on this page actually refers to Fig 1, and as noted just now, the text repeats all of the statistical information reported in this figure.

P 15: in para on unexplained stillbirths, create a longer sentence by changing ‘(9.5%). Tulip, . . . ’ to ‘(9.5%), while Tulip . . . ‘. Delete ‘of’ from ‘the proportion of unexplained stillbirth . . . ‘

P 17: sixth line from bottom, the p-value is missing a logical operator, looks like it should read ‘p=0.30’ based on the table.

P 20: sentence beginning ‘A recent evaluation. . . ;’ has two superfluous commas. Change ‘may be, in part, due to’ to ‘may result from’. Last line, delete ‘reason for’

P 21: first full para, end first sentence ‘cohorts.’ Delete ‘e.g.’ and begin new sentence ‘In the . . . ‘

P 22: last sentence before new para, delete ‘in our study’ and add ‘,’ after ‘However’. Change ‘it appears’ to ‘our results suggest’. Last para, delete ‘this was found not to be the case with’ in favor or ‘we found that’ and change ‘performing’ to ‘performed’. Delete ‘The reason’, add ‘may’ after CODAC and change ‘performed’ to ‘perform’

P 23: first line: delete ‘may be, in part,’ add ‘in part’ after ‘due’. Middle of page, change sentence to read ‘Publicly available written instructions were provided to the teams, but no other training was provided.’

P 25: first line, delete ‘and that is’. First full para, first line, delete ‘it is important to note that’. Hyphenate ‘non validated’

P 26: statement indicating general consensus that ICD does not meet needs for
stillbirth classification is a tremendous understatement!

References: item 8 and 11 are examples: prior to publication, recheck all URLs, and update date of access to current, ie Accessed March 2009. It is not necessary to reference the issue number of a journal unless the journal renumbers from page 1 each individual issue. Check this throughout.

Figure 1: recommend deleting as all data also mentioned in text.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'