Reviewer’s report

Title: Reporting and Methodologic Quality of Cochrane Neonatal Review Group Systematic Reviews

Version: 3 Date: 2 December 2008

Reviewer: Roger Soll

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to re–review the AlFaleh and Al–Omran’s manuscript, “Reporting and Methodologic Quality of Cochrane Neonatal Review Group Systematic Reviews”. I appreciate their efforts in answering the comments of the reviewers and, in general, think they have done a good job in responding to many of the criticisms. However, there are still fundamental issues with the manuscript that are somewhat problematic.

The recommendations for the style and methodology incorporated in Cochrane Reviews have changed dramatically over the past few years. Although the QUOROM statement first appeared in 1999, many of the reviews were originally constructed prior to that time. The updating process has focused on updating trials and not updating some of the methodological issues that have changed and improved. This has been an editorial decision in order to make sure that relatively current data is available. In addition, many of the issues that are criticized are policy differences between the Cochrane Neonatal Review Group and other review groups. For example, none of the titles include the term “systematic review” or “meta–analysis”. In part, this is because they are published in the Cochrane Library and are exclusively all systematic reviews and meta–analyses. There are serious restrictions to the word count for published abstracts that do not allow for the detailed methodology alluded to by the reviewers. Issues regarding fixed effect models and random effects models are clearly editorial decisions specifically stated in our guidelines. The use of random effects models in the case of heterogeneity is a disputed point.

In many ways, this highlights the deficiencies of using the QUOROM score without some validation regarding which aspects are most important in making a review valid. I would suggest that many of the deficiencies noted are relatively minor in nature. Other than people with a strong interest in methodology or editors, such as myself who are interested in improving the quality of Cochrane Reviews, I am still hard pressed to see the interest among the general readership. That said, I appreciate the tone of the review and the generally positive statements regarding the efforts of the Cochrane Neonatal Review Group and have personally learned and benefited from this analysis.

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 am the editor of the Cochrane Neonatal Review Group, which is the subject of this evaluation.