Author's response to reviews

Title: The incidence of all stroke and stroke subtype in the United Kingdom, 1985 to 2008: a systematic review

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Dear Editors,

We are pleased to submit a revised version of our paper “The incidence of all stroke and stroke subtype in the United Kingdom, 1985 to 2008: a systematic review” to BMC Public Health. We are grateful for the reviewers’ useful comments and have detailed our responses below.

Reviewer 1

1. Similar to the previous reviewer, but possibly for different reasons, I have concerns about the use of a 45 to 74 age group. In these comparisons data from less than 50% of all patients are utilised because of the age distribution of patients. This somewhat limits the usefulness of these analyses. Either provide new analyses or discuss the potential bias introduced by limiting these analyses to less than 50% of the incident strokes.

Response: A paragraph has been added in the strengths and weaknesses section of the discussion on page 14. This discusses that this age group accounts for only half of the incidence strokes and provides a justification of why the 45 to 74 age group was included.

2. The scales of the graphs in Figures 3 and 4 should each be the same. This would simplify comparison of findings between the different age distributions used.

Response: Thank you for pointing this out. The scales of the graphs in Figures 3 and 4 have now been changed so they are the same within each figure.

Reviewer 2

1. As incidence is a rate, it is not necessary to use the term 'incidence rate' but rather one or the other.

Response: The term ‘incidence rate’ has been changed to ‘incidence’ throughout the manuscript.

2. Although a comment has been made, it is not clear to me why the first Oxfordshire Community Stroke Project was not included, and particularly given that it was also reported in the Rothwell paper cited for the included second phase? This seems strange when only the South London study was included for temporal trends analysis.

Response: The years 1981 to 1984 of the Oxfordshire Community Stroke Project were not eligible to be included in the review, as the review period was from 1985 to 2008. The only eligible year from this study was 1985 to 1986, however the authors were unable to provide the raw data from this year needed for the review. A paragraph in the discussion section on page 14, explaining that this paper had been excluded, has now been extended to clarify why the data from this study was not included in the review and how it affected the time trends analysis.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Faithfully,

Prachi Bhatnagar, Dr Peter Scarborough, Nigel Smeeton and Dr Steven Allender