Reviewer’s report

Title: Public Health Interventions in Midwifery: a systematic review of systematic reviews

Version: 1 Date: 3 May 2012

Reviewer: Natalie Spearing

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper. The authors are to be congratulated on their synthesis of an enormous amount of information into a well-written, well-organised, and valuable summary of the literature in this field, which extends previous work in this area. The authors demonstrate good knowledge of the major issues to consider when reviewing systematic reviews (and of SR methods). The discussion and conclusions are supported by the data they present, and they clearly identify gaps in the review literature.

NS: Minor Essential Revisions

1. It is arguably just as important (if not more so) to highlight those interventions for which there is strong evidence, from well-conducted studies/reviews, of NO effect – as it is to showcase the interventions that are effective. I would recommend that the authors mention this in the paper – perhaps in the Discussion. [They might also consider another review of reviews in the future that highlights those interventions for which there is no evidence, based on “cream of the crop” reviews, as a means of educating clinicians and consumers about the “old wives’ tales”.

2. In the abstract, there is inconsistent use of tense in the Conclusion section.

3. In the Introduction, the first item that is mentioned (the review of midwifery in the UK) should be referenced in this section.

4. In the Methods section, it is not clear what the purpose of the logic model is when it is first mentioned – although this becomes evident later on in the paper. Perhaps the end of the Methods section could be modified to clarify, briefly, why this was done?

5. It would be a useful addition to include a table that defines what exactly is meant by 1+, 1- or 2++ reviews etc. in the Quality Assessment and Effectiveness of Reviews section.
6. “Kangaroo” has a typo.

7. Some minor inconsistencies were observed in the formatting of the references – would be worth double-checking the requirements of the journal.

NS: Discretionary Revisions

8. The authors need to consider more use of paragraphs – these tend to be a bit long and unwieldy at present. For example, the authors could separate the 2nd paragraph under Methods into sections on the search/selection strategy and data extraction methods.

9. For clarity, would suggest grouping inclusion and exclusion criteria in the 2nd paragraph under Methods.

10. There are a lot of acronyms, which are probably all very recognizable to the clinicians who will read this article, but it would be worthwhile reviewing the journal’s policy on defining acronyms. Would suggest adding a note to Table 1 with definitions of the acronyms used in the table.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.