Reviewer's report

Title: The effectiveness of land based exercise compared to decompressive surgery in the management of lumbar spinal-canal stenosis: a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 24 August 2011

Reviewer: stephen may

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions:

Effectiveness of land-based exercise compared to decompressive surgery in the management of spinal stenosis: a systematic review.

2. On page 5 you describe a preliminary scoping search, which appears to change your research question and methods. It is unclear what has been done here. I would assume that in a systematic review, you can only make this decision after you have selected the studies and extracted data. You describe that data extraction was done independently by two review authors. How is it then possible to do an initial scoping exercise? Please explain this procedure in more detail.

3. And furthermore consider the title of the review, as it does not fully reflect what you have done.

4. Page 5 - You have a date limit of 2000, with an arbitrary justification about capturing the most up to date interventions; without a clear reason (such as introduction of some technology, which does not seem relevant), I think this cannot be justified.

5. It is not usual practice to include non-RCTs in systematic reviews on effectiveness - again I think this needs more justification.

6. What was the level of disagreement between reviewers? (pages 7 and 8)

7. Page 9 - One article was excluded as not being available in full text; this appears to be an article and not an abstract; so this is not a valid reason for exclusion, or again needs further justification.

8. Page 14 - in discussion of methodological quality the issue about non-optimal study designs is not mentioned, although the availability of only 2 RCTs is mentioned on the following page.

9. Please check reference numbers - on page 16 you reference 'Weinstein's review [29]' - in the reference list this is [28], but was this actually a review?

Discretionary revisions
1. Though the background is commendably brief it is rather limited in terms of epidemiology, what is known about the topic and so on.

**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 i have no competing interests