Reviewer’s report

Title: Single- Versus Two- Layer Intestinal Anastomosis: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials

Version: 2 Date: 7 October 2005

Reviewer: Roger Harbord

Reviewer’s report:

General

The authors have accepted most of my suggested revisions and I am generally happy with their responses and the changes made. However, they have not altered the conclusion section of the abstract and I still consider that this is too strongly worded given the results.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

None.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1) I suggest that in the conclusion section of the abstract, "no advantage is derived.." be revised to better reflect the very wide confidence interval around the combined risk ratio (0.49 to 1.69). For instance, "We found no evidence that an advantage is derived..", or, "No evidence was found that two-layer intestinal anastomosis leads to fewer post-operative leaks than single layer".

2) The two new sentences the authors have added to the "Discussion - limitations" section need some revision as the first sentence and the first clause of the second sentence appear virtually contradictory:

"First, the study by Goligher et al. had an effect on the main result strongly. Although the main result was not sensitive to the sensitivity analysis excluding this study,..."

Perhaps this should read something along the lines of:
"First, the study by Goligher et al. had a substantial influence on the combined risk ratio. However, the main conclusion of a lack of evidence for an advantage of two-layer over single-layer anastomosis is unaffected, as the result of a sensitivity analysis excluding this study was more favourable to single-layer."

3) There are a few other minor language corrections needed, particularly in the new material added e.g.:

"none of the variables for year of publication, mean age of study participants, and percentage of male patients.." ->
"neither year of publication, mean age of study participants, nor percentage of male patients.."

"Although one possible explanation of this high rate of leaks may be caused by their inclusion criteria, ..., it is inexplicable for all".
Delete "caused by". Meaning of "it is inexplicable for all" is unclear.

"To say the least, this suture technique is not common .. in the present day" ("to say the least" needs to be changed or deleted)

In "Discussion- limitations", "Secondly, quality of" -> "Secondly, the quality of..

Table 2 "colo-anal anastomosis, so low in the pelvis" (meaning unclear).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

None.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.