Reviewer’s report

Title: Modern perspectives on the use of national oral health data recording in Scandinavian child and adolescent populations

Version: 1
Date: 21 January 2014

Reviewer: Rebecca Harris

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions
1. The title needs to be more specific to reflect the content of the paper for example – is it a narrative review, a systematic review or a description of the Scandinavian systems etc?
2. Improving the clarity of the objectives of the paper

The objectives of the paper are listed in the abstract and in the last paragraph of the introduction. These however are not clearly explained, possibly because the English needs improving and the purpose of the paper more clearly identified. The paper seems to be doing a few different things and ends up not doing them well. It may be better to focus on one or two of the objectives. For example: it is not clear what ‘visualising the potential for using epidemiological data’ is all about, nor is it obvious to those not involved with the Scandinavian system what ‘alternative oral health registrations’ means. The applications need to be pertinent and able to be understood by an international audience.

I am not at all sure whether the stated objectives are what the authors actually have in mind for the paper. It seems to be more about a comparison of systems of collecting epidemiological data in various Scandinavian countries, but the comparison aspect isn’t mentioned in the title or objectives. There is some interesting information in the paper but it needs presenting in a different way so that readers can understand more about the Scandinavian context and what this reveals that could help other dental epidemiologists and policy makers working in different systems.

Background section
3. The English and writing needs to be improved throughout the paper. Often there is a briefer way of writing what is said. Making it more concise would help the clarity.

Just one example to illustrate: ‘Second paragraph: ……interest for dental health……is not of new date’: the authors actually mean ‘is not new’.

Often the text doesn’t have much content – in other words, there some fairly vague statements which don’t contribute very much in the introduction. The introduction should be rewritten to make all the text count in terms of contributing to the line of argument set out.
4. The line of argument in the introduction needs to be revisited. It often isn’t clear what point is being made, and how this builds into outlining the purpose of the argument – for example the section on the Lalonde report. It is not at all clear what is being said about the various types of data collected on a national basis – I gather that there is a mixture perhaps of data on risk of disease, as well as disease itself, but the reasoning appears mixed up together. Where does access to care fit in for example – this is about treating disease? Adding more text perhaps to explain the reasoning may help.

5. The Scandinavian system needs some more explanation earlier in the background section. We aren’t given adequate contextual information throughout the paper.

Methods

6. The methods of the paper again don’t really make clear what the study is about. It uses the word ‘systematic’, but we don’t know what this represents. It uses terminology that would be used for a systematic review such as ‘eligible’, but there isn’t a recognised methodology called ‘systematic mapping’, unless the authors can provide a reference for this. The authors need to make clearer exactly what their methodology is. This probably just means expanding the text to explain more about the principles and detail of what was done. because the purpose of the study isn’t clear, having an only brief methods section only adds to the confusion.

Figures

7. The Figures and Tables in the paper of poor quality and need to be redrawn or abandoned. Currently the Figures do not have titles. There is not enough description in the text to understand what was done and what the Figures/Tables mean.

Discussion

8. The discussion referring to modern concepts of managing disease is not well explained. It may be worth the authors really simplifying the paper and to take this line of argument out.

9. The discussion should follow the objectives, and address these, but there are sub-sections in the discussion such as validity and data quality which are not referred to in the introduction, and this adds to the confusion about what the paper is really about.

10. The discussion for example goes off on a tangent about recall intervals etc on page 12, and the reader is not sure how the paper connects together.. Some of this content is more interesting than the pieces on concepts of managing disease.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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