Reviewer's report

Title: A review of randomized controlled trials evaluating the effectiveness of handheld computers for data collection.

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Reviewer: Dirk Stengel

Reviewer's report:

The authors set out to compile randomized controlled trials that evaluated certain proxies of effectiveness with handheld computers for research purposes. Modern PDAs provide extensive features similar to (sub-) notebooks, and are used with increasing popularity by health care professionals for many tasks (e.g., documentation, e-learning, networking, data collection, and so on). With the availability of these powerful tools at the bedside, both daily practice and clinical research markedly changed. It is a laudable goal to aggregate information on whether and how the introduction of handheld computing affects doctors and patients attitudes, perceptions, and ratings as compared to more conventional, paper-based methods of information retrieval.

Unfortunately, the current paper does not provide a reliable basis for a better understanding of qualitative or quantitative effects caused by PDA-technology in clinical research. Given the abundance of previous reviews on this topic (I attached a list of recent publications), this manuscript adds almost nothing to current knowledge. A major drawback of this work is the limited search strategy already applied in other studies (restriction to Index Medicus, and trials published in English language only), and I am afraid the authors will not have a chance to publish their paper in a peer-reviewed journal until they extend their search to the Cochrane Central database, EMBASE, and others. Also, I strongly recommend inclusion of studies published in French, German, Spanish, and other languages as well.

In conclusion, I like to encourage the authors to proceed with their interesting work. By extending the database, a future manuscript will be silhouetted against other narrative reviews on this important issue.


**Which journal?**: Too insignificant to warrant publication in BMC Medical Research Methodology

**What next?**: Reject because too insignificant for publication in any BMC journal

**Quality of written English**: Acceptable

**Statistical review**: No