Reviewer's report

Title: Clinical decision support tools: analysis of online drug information databases

Version: 1 Date: 23 January 2007

Reviewer: Paul Taylor

Reviewer's report:

General

This seems to me to be an article that would be of greater interest to the medical librarian community than to the general health informatics community. There is little novelty in terms of what is evaluated or how, and nothing of great moment is concluded.

I agree that it is important to subject commonly available databases to a test, but I'm not sure that it is _scientifically_ important, it is almost a 'consumer association' trial rather a scientific study.

The paper doesn't really address the question of decision support tools, the databases are evaluated as databases rather than as aids to decision making, the questions asked relate more to coverage and ease of access, less to impact or emphasis.

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

p4
More needs to be said about the process by which the set of questions was created. How was the published literature used? How many questions came from this source? Describe the NSUDIC's record of queries, how were questions selected from this source? How questions were sent to review, by how many pharmacists were they reviewed? Why by pharmacists? You should include examples of questions (or all questions) as an appendix.

The methods used for assessment of 'ease of use' seems to me be deeply flawed. It isn't clear that a database can in which it takes two clicks to get at the required information is any better than one in which it takes three clicks. The time taken to access the information or the user's assessment of the cognitive effort required would be much better measures. This section, I think, needs to be revised or downgraded.

The weighting of the different elements of the evaluation in the creation of the composite score needs to be justified.

It would seem important to include information on the manner in which the databases are created and how frequently they are updated.

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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)

There no need to introduce an abbreviation HIT for health information technology. On page 5 the phrase 'dose of Refludan for HIT' occurs. I assume that this is either a misprint (HIV?) or a different meaning of the acronym. In the same passage I am unclear what an 'aPPT ratio' is.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions
Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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