Author’s response to reviews

Title: Estimating the extent that the use of telemedicine reduces travel for patients, carers and health professionals: proposal for a systematic review and some observations on data synthesis

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Version: 2 Date: 5 April 2011

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Senior Executive Editor

We have included an Acknowledgements section as requested.

We have revised the manuscript, using Track Changes, in the light of the points raised by reviewer 2. On the whole, we believe that most of the information requested is already in the paper, and our response (below) explains this. We are more than willing to make further revisions if specific issues are raised.

Reviewer 1

We agree with the reviewer that the topic being addressed is an important one.

Reviewer 2

1) It is unclear where about the method reflect the final part of the title, 'Estimating.........some observations on data synthesis'.

1. Our observations on issues related to data synthesis are included in the Introduction (subsection on page 3 labelled "Data synthesis") and are also considered in the Discussion on pages 7 and 8.

2) It seems that studies with various designs will be potentially included to this review. However, the authors do not have information

2.1) how they will handle the issue in their synthesis and

2.2) how they will assess risk of bias of each included study.

2.1 Differences in study design will be reflected in the scores given to different studies, as indicated on pages 5 and 6. The study design score will contribute to
the study weighting factor, discussed on page 6. Stronger study designs will receive a higher score.

2.2 Risk of bias will be related to study design and also to study performance—the way in which the study was performed and reported. There is also possible bias related to very small sample size, though we consider this to be a less likely component, given our selection criteria.

In our proposed approach, each of these areas is assessed and given a score. The scores are then combined to give a weighting factor for use in our analysis. This is explained on page 5 and 6. Assessment of risk of bias is therefore ‘built in’ to our evaluation of study characteristics and directly influences the estimate of reduction in travel from use of a telemedicine application.

3) Unclear what data will be extracted from each included study.

3. Data to be extracted from studies are summarised in the subsection "Article selection and data extraction" on page 5 and illustrated in the example presented on pages 6 and 7.

4) Sequence of the introduction and method sections are difficult to follow.

4. We feel that the sequence of the various sections is appropriate, given the nature of our proposal. The Methods section logically follows on from the conceptual material given in the Introduction that outlines the basis of our proposed approach. We are open to the Editor's suggestions for an alternative sequence of presentation.