Reviewer's report

Title: What is preventable harm in healthcare? A Systematic Review of definitions

Version: 3 Date: 20 March 2012

Reviewer: Ian D Maidment

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors have used the term “medication adverse effect” throughout the article, but this is not defined. Moreover, it is not clear if a medication adverse effect is a side-effect, which may not be preventable, or an error, which is usually preventable.

2. For an international journal the authors need to adopt a more international approach. For example guidance on “never events” has also been issued by the UK NPSA.

3. Figure 1 needs more work; the authors need to give details why 116 studies were excluded. Also the maths is incorrect.

4. The 2nd paragraph on page 5 needs referencing.

5. Methods – why did the authors exclude both any study published prior to Jan 2001 and non-English language studies? My opinion is that studies published prior to Jan 2001 may well be relevant and should be included.

6. On page 9 the authors mention 3 articles, which were most frequently cited – did these articles define preventable harm and if so how did the definition compare to the authors’ definition?

7. The paragraph beginning on page 12 is too long and should be broken up – in particular the last 2 sentences don’t flow well – indeed this issue of “near misses” should be a separate paragraph.

8. Last line page 13 – I wasn’t clear where 7/22 comes from. Also the 17 other studies – again I’m not sure if the maths is correct.

9. Paragraph structure on page 14 needs reviewing e.g. I’m not sure that “Using this definition ......” is a separate paragraph.

10. I found some of the numbers confusing in particular data is quoted in the discussion, which is not in the results section. I wondered if it would be useful, in the results section, to have a table cross-tabulating the definitions of harm with the type of harm and listing numbers of studies in each box.
11. I found the last sentence of the conclusion confusing – too many words beginning – definit........

Minor Essential Revisions

1. If the word count permits it would be interesting to discuss the apparent contradiction between a “Never Event” that is not always preventable.

2. Mis-spelling – the authors have spelt fait (when I think they mean fair) – page 10.

3. Why have the authors quoted a median rather than a mean Kappa?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None