Reviewer's report

Title: Reporting of measures of accuracy in systematic reviews of diagnostic literature

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Reviewer: Dr Carolyn Rutter

Level of interest: A paper of limited interest

Advice on publication: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the compulsory revisions

Overall, this is a reasonable review, that points out issues that should be known to people who both report results from studies and those who meta-analyze them. A drawback of the paper is that it points out problems, but does not offer solution. It also seems that this ground has already been covered, both by an earlier review and by other articles offering solution (e.g., Moses, Shapiro, and Littenberg 1993 and Rutter and Gatsonis 2001).

In a couple of places the paper refers to problems with pooling of sensitivity and specificity. This problem should be stated more precisely. That is, the problem occurs when sensitivity and specificity are combined separately. In this case, summary ROC models should be used to combine estimates.

Is the extend of the survey of papers the only difference between the current manuscript and the Walter and Jadad article? If so, then this paper is of limited interest. (If you disagree, then give some reasons in the text - do you conclusions differ? do you include many more articles? have methods changed a lot in the last couple of years?) If not, please state the difference between the current manuscript and the Walter and Jadad article more clearly.

The "time trend" referred to is not a time trend as the authors test for differences between papers published earlier and those published later.

In table 1, please not how the searches work in words. Description of the symbolic search is not useful for people who don't routinely carry out such searches.

Table 3: The summary sensitivity can be estimated from the summary ROC curve. The authors should distinguish this from the summary sensitivity (and other measures) based on pooling sensitivity across studies INDEPENDENTLY from specificity.

Competing interests:

None declared.