Reviewer’s report

Title: Inter-rater agreement in the scoring of abstracts submitted to a primary care research conference

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Reviewer: Ms Liz Wager

Level of interest: A paper of limited interest

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

This is a useful small study, clearly reported.

COMPULSORY REVISIONS

Title
I think the final word has fallen off the title - I presume it should read 'a primary care research conference'

Table
I am not terribly familiar with intra-cluster correlation coefficients but a value of 0 when there is 37% agreement (but 0.22 when there is 38% agreement) seems odd. I suggest that the authors check the first couple of lines in the second column

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

Results
I would be interested to see the range of the scores for accepted and rejected abstracts as well as the mean +SD.

Figure
I didn't really think that this added substantially to the paper and suggest it could be dropped.

Discussion
I agree with the authors that the use of reviewer checklists has not been studied enough, so this is a useful addition to the area. However, there are several previous studies of inter-reviewer reliability, some using checklists, they might care to look at and cite:


Cullen DJ & Macaulay A. Consistency between peer reviewers for a clinical specialty journal. Academic Medicine 1992; 67:856-9


Another very interesting paper asking a slightly different, but very relevant question is:

Justice AC et al Do readers and peer reviewers agree on manuscript quality? JAMA 1994; 272:117-9

I suggest that the discussion section should be broadened to include discussion of these earlier studies and thus put the current study into the context of the previous (albeit fairly limited) research.

Conclusions
The authors are cautious in their last paragraph and have not written a formal conclusion section. In my mind this is a pity. It would be interesting to hear what they recommend and what they think of the following questions.
Are subjective questions useful?
Can they be made more useful (eg by being more specific, and asking about interest for one particular meeting rather than interest in general?)
Should reviewers be given more information about the aims of the meeting/journal?
Should meeting organisers use subje

Competing interests:
None declared.