Reviewer’s report

Title: Translating research into policy in developing countries: a case study of magnesium sulphate for pre-eclampsia

Version: 1 Date: 28 July 2005

Reviewer: stephen robert hanney

Reviewer’s report:

General
This article is generally well written and provides useful insights on the important topic of research utilisation in developing countries, where there is comparatively limited previous work. The article adopts a broad-brush perspective in relation to a significant new case study and various methods were adopted, successfully in most cases, and integrated to obtain data from a range of sources. Various sensible conclusions are drawn and related to the complexity and diversity of the situations identified in the study.

I’ve made my comments using the headings requested, but mostly placed them under the heading ‘discretionary revisions’ because I do not think these points are ‘compulsory revisions’. Nevertheless, some could be quite important.

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

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. In the paragraph on limitations (p.21), 2 different points start with ‘firstly’, Even though one is a counter-argument, it should be amended.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. In the opening paragraph of the abstract reference is made to the objective of the study being to examine the translation of findings ‘into policies and actions’. Should the title of the article be slightly amended to reflect this? Or, perhaps, the text slightly altered?

2. The opening paragraph of the article states that ‘evidence from developing countries is particularly thin’. It is true that there is limited evidence but it might be useful to refer at least a little more to that evidence that does exist in relation to developing countries, such as specific articles, for example: Garner P, Kale R, Dickson R, Dans T, Salinas R: Getting research findings into practice: implementing research findings in developing countries. BMJ 1998, 317: 531-535 and wider reviews, for example:

3. The description of Phase 2 of the methods (p.8) states that data were also collected from
countries that had not participated in the Magpie Trial. This was a good idea, but it might be helpful if the relevant countries were identified in the text rather than just appearing as part of a general list of countries from where drug information officers were approached. It might then also be useful if at least some analysis was reported on whether there had been any differences between the findings from countries in which the research had been conducted and the others.

4. In several places I believe the text could benefit from providing a little more detail and being more specific, for example, about what is meant by ‘Lack of channels to overcome political barriers’ (Table 2). Similarly, although various policies are discussed, it might be useful to have some account of what definition of the term ‘policy’ is being adopted, because it can be interpreted in different ways, in particular in relation to the role of professional associations. Some accounts of research utilisation in health policymaking discuss the way in which different levels and definitions of policymaking and different models might be more appropriate in relation to some types of research than others, and this type of approach can also provide a framework for discussion of issues such as the concept of interaction. It might, therefore, be useful to draw on some of the analysis of such issues from accounts provided, for example, in: Hanney S, Gonzalez-Block M, Buxton M, Kogan M: The utilisation of health research in policy-making: concepts, examples and methods of assessment. Health Research Policy and Systems 2003; 1:2. http://www.health-policy-systems.com/content/pdf/1478-4505-1-2.pdf

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests