Reviewer's report

Title: Methods underpinning national clinical guidelines for hypertension: describing the evidence shortfall.

Version: 1 Date: 14 October 2005

Reviewer: Aileen McIntosh

Reviewer's report:

General
1. This is a well written paper.
2. It is difficult to determine who the authors are targeting the paper at. It does not go into sufficient detail of guideline methodology to be of particular interest to guideline developers nor does it help those with an interest in hypertension to be clearer about recommendations/actions to follow.
3. The abstract says the paper compares the methods used in gathering, analysing and linking evidence to guideline recommendations however insufficient detail is given in each of these areas to allow the reader to understand how these areas differed or were similar and therefore judgments to be made about them. As it stands the paper says that different guidelines use different methods and come up with different recommendations which is of limited use/interest to readers.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
4. More detail is required about the similarities and differences in evidence and recommendation grading approaches used, to allow comparisons to be made by the reader.
5. More detail is required about how the literature/research evidence used mapped (or not) to the questions asked by the guidelines (this is hinted at but not explored).
6. More information is required about guideline development group composition and its impact on recommendations.
7. The linking of evidence and recommendations needs to be further discussed to be of interest to guideline developers.
8. The abstract talks of different approaches to the use of evidence in different guidelines but this is not sufficiently discussed for a picture to be built by the reader.
9. Rather than only covering the key aspects of hypertension management in eleven guidelines and presenting the recommendations from the different guidelines, more detailed appraisal/discussion of a fewer number of key aspects could also be looked at and discussed in the context of the guideline development issues that the authors say they are going to address but don't fully address.
10. The authors should decide if the focus of the paper is guideline methodology and use aspects of hypertension to pursue (in detail) those methodological arguments -or the focus is hypertension with a brief overview of differences. At present it feels more like the second although the title and abstract suggest the first.
11. The relationship between the authors and the development of any of the guidelines perhaps needs to be clearer in the competing interests/acknowledgements.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

In the past five years I have been funded by NICE to develop clinical guidelines through the NICE National Co-ordinating Centre for Primary Care. This funding was via NCC-PC to my institution and contributed to my salary.