Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 13 November 2005

Reviewer: Marc van Wijk

Reviewer’s report:

General

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

The aim of this study was to review the validity, reproducibility and reliability of 11 guidelines for hypertension and to explore how evidence has been used in shaping these guidelines. In the methods section the authors do not clarify which criteria they used for including the hypertension guidelines in the review. They mention "six guidelines identified by the German Guideline Clearing House as passing set methodological criteria and written in English (NZ, VHA, WHO, CMA, ICSI, SA), updated versions of two further guidelines meeting the same criteria (JNC, BHS) and three recently published guidelines (SIGN, ESH, NICE)". Apart from "written in English" and "meeting the same criteria" the authors mention no precise criteria for inclusion in the review. SIGN, ESH and NICE have no inclusion criteria at all apart from "recently published". Because time span of issued guidelines that were included in the review varies substantially there is a strong need for well described criteria (for review inclusion). In addition two guidelines preceded the availability of angiotensin receptors, raising doubt about the usefulness of including these guidelines for comparing prescription recommendations.

Comparing the grading of recommendations made in the guidelines the authors find different grading for the same recommendations. To my opinion they fail in assessing the difference in grading recommendations if linked to exactly the same literature references. Assessing these differences might explicate more clearly the role of the members of the guideline group in the decision making process as well as possible competing interest

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

The legenda of tabel 2 does not include a description of N in all columns except the "used existing systematic reviews" column.

Ten of guidelines (page 5): Ten of the guidelines

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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 importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests