Author's response to reviews

Title: Too little but not too late: Results of a literature review to improve routine immunization programs in developing countries

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Version: 3 Date: 24 April 2008

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Damian Walker:

Thank you for once again taking the time to conduct a thorough review of our paper, “Too little but not too late: Results of a literature review to improve routine immunization programs in developing countries”. We have carefully reviewed your comments and believe we have adequately addressed them. In particular we hope that we have provided you adequate evidence regarding the added value of this review. Please find attached detailed responses for each comment along with the revised manuscript. Changes to the manuscript are highlighted in yellow.

Thank you for your review of this manuscript.

Respectfully submitted,
Tove K. Ryman

Reviewer’s report
Title: Too little but not too late: Results of a literature review to improve routine immunization programs in developing countries
Version: 2
Date: 7 March 2008
Reviewer: Damian Walker

Reviewer’s report:
I remain unconvinced with regards to the added-value of this review, which was my major comment previously. I do not think the authors have sufficiently addressed this point with reference to the two previously published papers on this topic (Pegurri et al. 2005 and Batt et al. 2004). I still find it curious that the authors do not recognise the contributions of these papers from the outset, i.e. in the Background section and state explicitly what is it that their review adds over and above them. Reference to these papers is still made exclusively in the Discussion section and it is still incorrectly inferred that these review only focussed on costs and cost-effectivness. They could mention the fact that this review identified additional papers not identified by the previous reviews etc. I'm not convinced that a more specific review is sufficient justification however, given that the other reviews covered that ground and more.

RESPONSE: We have made reference to the two previously published papers in the background section, where we also address what differentiates our paper and describes what it adds to the knowledge base. Beyond just the additional papers identified in our review, our inclusion criteria do not require primary data on effectiveness or cost-effectiveness. Our paper specifically looks at what strategies have been used to improve routine immunization programs and what kinds of outcomes have been reported. In addition to coverage, reported outcomes included increase in timely vaccination, reduction in missed opportunities, improved injection safety and improved availability of services.
We have also corrected the discussion to say, “These data have not been included since the two other reviews, previously mentioned, have reviewed and published the cost-effectiveness, as well as effectiveness, of various immunization service strategies.” Our point not being that the other two reviews are limited to cost-effectiveness data, but rather that we do not report this as it has already been published.

They argue that their target audience is program managers, but it remains unclear to me how they would benefit from this review (or indeed the ‘other’ one for that matter!). Specifically, I don’t believe my question "If an intervention is shown to be effective in one setting does that ensure that it will be effective if applied elsewhere, and importantly vice versa?" has been addressed. How have, or how do, the authors plan to disseminate the findings of this review to that audience?

**RESPONSE:** We believe that providing program managers with a list of potential strategies to improve routine immunization programs allows the manager to identify strategies which are most appropriate for their particular situation. We do not argue that if an intervention is shown to be effective in one setting that it ensures that it will be effective if applied elsewhere. In the second paragraph of our discussion we point out the challenges around interpreting effectiveness of an intervention based on coverage data; for example the baseline coverage data in an area will affect the potential increases in coverage. This is one reason why we chose not to have effectiveness data as one of our inclusion criteria.

One of the reasons that we selected this journal, is that it is open access and will allow free distribution of this review to our target audience.

Sorry to dwell on this, but the Batt et al. (2004) paper found that the grey literature was an important source of information and that is was not always of poor quality. My previous comment was simply meant to question that this review has systematically reviewed the grey literature, which is a huge undertaking! Nor have the search histories been included. Although it is good to see the checklist has now been included.

**RESPONSE:**
We think that it is hard to define a systematic review of the gray literature as there are always additional searches that can be done. Due to finances we were unable to visit locations to assess literature in person, which was identified as potentially important in the Batt, et al paper and which we mention as a limitation. However we do feel that our search through contacting experts in the immunization field and reviewing websites was comprehensive. We have however changed the wording in the introduction to say, “To help identify these strategies, a review of gray literature and a systematic review of published literature were conducted.”

We do not disagree that gray literature is an important source of information and mention a limitation of this study being that, “The methods used to assess the
quality of papers and thus determine their eligibility for inclusion in this review may have been biased toward published papers as many gray literature papers did not discuss the study methodology used in enough detail to allow it to be assessed.”

Our search strategy is provided in table one of the document and we have also attached the below table of our search history. Furthermore, we have more clearly documented the number of papers included in our literature search in the methods section.

Search History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number identified</th>
<th>Number collected</th>
<th>Number reviewed</th>
<th>Number included</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal databases searched</td>
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<td>200</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray literature, including websites, experts, etc.</td>
<td>103*</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The number identified is difficult to enumerate as not all titles and abstracts reviewed were counted, however 103 documents were downloaded and/or requested for further review.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests