Reviewer’s report

Title: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the effects of Clinical Pathways on length of stay, hospital costs and patient outcomes

Version: 2 Date: 2 October 2008

Reviewer: Patriek Mistiaen

Reviewer’s report:

In general, the authors gave a good response to my comments and adjusted the manuscript accordingly. But I like to discuss two (minor) issues:

1. Inclusion process: the response of the authors is not completely satisfactory; it is still not clear if the inclusion was done by one or by more reviewers in the different phases of the inclusion process. In this regard, you find a quote below from the Cochrane handbook 2008:

   “2.3.4.1 The importance of a team
   It is essential that Cochrane reviews be undertaken by more than one person. This ensures that tasks such as selection of studies for eligibility and data extraction can be performed by at least two people independently, increasing the likelihood that errors are detected.”

2. Methodological assessment: in this new version of the manuscript, it became clear that the authors applied not only content-criteria but also methodological quality criteria to in- and exclude studies. Was the methodological assessment done by two authors? How was the agreement? And how were disagreements solved? I consider this important since this is a judgment about other’s work.

I would advise that the authors add in the paragraph ‘study selection criteria’ that also methodological quality criteria were set.

Finally, it was a surprise for me to read in this new version that 75% of the studies that fulfilled the content-criteria, were rated as ‘high risk of bias’ and excluded. This must be discussed somewhere and there has to be concluded that the research on clinical pathways must urgently be improved. Or maybe there can be something wrong with the applied instrument (a ‘high risk of bias’ is already assigned if only one criterion was rated as ‘not done’)?
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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