Reviewer's report

Title: Improving the Use of Research Evidence in Guideline Development: 3. Group Composition

Version: 1 Date: 14 May 2006

Reviewer: Regina Kunz

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper is part of a series of reviews by the WHO Advisory Committee on Health Research to the WHO. This review of the series addresses issues about the composition of guideline groups based on three pre-defined key questions a) on the composition of WHO panels, b) on the groups to be consulted by the panel and c) on methods to ensure appropriate consultation. The authors start by reviewing the current approach of the WHO for group composition and identifying its weaknesses in the existing methodology or in its implementation and compare it to the various approaches used by other key organizations in the composition of guideline groups. Then the authors contrast these approaches with the current empirical evidence and integrate them in their specific recommendations to the WHO.

This is a nice and well written paper addressing an important question for organizations setting up guideline panels and critical issues for a successful completion of a guidelines. The limited empirical evidence on group composition highlighted in this review further supports the role of this paper and its advice to the WHO for further empirical exploration of this issue. Given the particular role of the WHO on health care issues, the recommendations conveyed by this paper to this important organization will achieve attention by many other guideline organization.

The paper is well reasoned. The methodology to the series has been reported in a separate paper which is not part of this publication. The authors used a structured approach in contrasting the process of group composition by the WHO and several other influential organizations and compare their findings to what has been identified empirically through systematic research (acknowledging that it was beyond their scope to do a comprehensive in-depth review themselves). The authors identify the relevant knowledge gaps to the key questions and use logical and/or pragmatic arguments in their recommendations that are in line with the common understanding of what is required to achieve a successful guideline process and a broad acceptance of the final product. The different angles and perspectives (WHO, different organizations, empirical evidence) ensure transparent and objective information of the reader and the WHO which is well distinguished from the recommendations to the WHO that invariably includes judgment on behalf of the authors. This two step approach provides credibility to the review.

As a side mark: The statement in the conclusion that a more exhaustive review would not yield a great deal of additional evidence at this time seems somewhat strong given that the technology report used as main source for relevant part of the review is nearly 10 years old and it might be worth down toning on it.

The authors have chosen a well built, easy-to-follow structure of their manuscript, they avoided jargon and did not get lost in details.

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

NONE

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

On page 6, line 4 of the paper, reference 4 needs to be added.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I would recommend to tone down the statement more exhaustive review would not yield a great deal
of additional evidence at this time.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**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.