Author's response to reviews

Title: Improving the Use of Research Evidence in Guideline Development: 4. Managing conflicts of interests

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Improving the Use of Research Evidence in Guideline Development: 4. Managing Conflicts of Interests

Response to Reviewer: Hans Hogerzeil

Major Revisions:
The literature review is not fully complete (e.g. agreement by the major editors on managing conflicts of interest, the current WHO reporting form for external experts)
RESPONSE: As described in the methods, we conducted a thorough literature search of the peer-reviewed and grey literature. On page 13, we discuss how more journals have moved towards disclosure policies, although many still do not have them. We cite Krimsky’s work to support this point. We have reinserted a reference that we deleted during editing that is a joint statement from journal editors re COI (page 13, reference 41). We describe the WHO draft guidelines and reporting form for external experts on pages 5 and 6. If the reviewer is referring to a different form, we have not been able to find it.

The abstract mentions conclusions that are not to be found in the paper.
RESPONSE: Our recommendations are based on conclusions from the described evidence. We edited the recommendations to clarify these links (see response below).

The paper ends rather abruptly.
RESPONSE: We end by summarizing the lack of empirical evidence and how WHO’s draft guidelines are moving in a rigorous direction. We do not see how to expand this without being repetitive and extending beyond our word limit.

Missing point: Why WHO’s plan is OK
RESPONSE: We have rephrased the final sentence on page 15 as: “WHO’s proposed draft recommendations represent a more rigorous evaluation of conflicts of interest because it requires more complete disclosure, clearer standards for evaluating COIs and explicit management strategies.”

Missing also: a clear separation of which recommendations are evidence-based and which are more opinion based.
RESPONSE: On page 8, we describe the lack of systematic reviews and randomized trials related to COI policies and management strategies. In addition, in several places in the paper we point out the need for further research. Our first 2 recommendations (page 2) state that no empirical evidence exists. We have rephrased the second two recommendations (page 2 -3) to make it clear that we are relying on data describing what other institutions and organizations do, rather than our own opinion.

Minor revisions
RESPONSE: p. 6, para 3, line 3: we have changed “this report” to “our report” because we are referring to the paper that was being reviewed.
Most references are incomplete.
RESPONSE: We are not sure what else is needed. All references include author (when available), title, source, date, publisher and pages or URL if on-line.

Response to Reviewer: Mike Kelly

The authors should note that NICE has been since April 2005 the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (although the acronym NICE remains unchanged) and that it is currently reviewing its policies on disclosure and conflict of interest.

RESPONSE: We have corrected NICE’s name and noted that it is currently reviewing its policies on disclosure and conflict of interest.