Reviewer's report

Title: Improving the Use of Research Evidence in Guideline Development: 16. Evaluation

Version: 1  Date: 20 April 2006

Reviewer: Merrick Zwarenstein

Reviewer's report:

General

Useful paper, important topic, some clarification needed.

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

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I think the title is not clear- could it be changed to indicate what exactly is being evaluated? (evidence basedness of guideline, evidence base for implementation of guideline, implementation of guideline are some of the alternative possibilities that I can see, and many readers will not be clear which until they read the paper.

I prefer a structured abstract to the confusing set of q and a in the abstract. These q and a's seem to me to be the aims, or research questions in this review, but they are not again mentioned until they are used as headings in the findings section. They would make a sensible aims/research questions/objectives list.

I find several sentences too long and too imprecise- eg, last sentence in background ends with the bit on uncertainties- but the nature of these uncertainties, or even there subject- what is uncertain?- is left, well.... uncertain.

I am not sure that the section on how to evaluate the strategies for guideline implementation will be understood, or accepted. I think that the WHO is asking how to implement guidelines, not how to do implementation research. In other words, they are hoping that the best strategy for implementing most guidelines has already been broadly figured out in research already completed, and that each new guideline simply has to be implemented using already proven methods. If this were true, then, correctly, who would not want or need to do more trials. Unfortunately the evidence is very thin, and so the authors are suggesting that every guideline implementation effort should be turned into a piece of research to further the thin knowledge base we have on effectiveness of implementation strategies. But that is asking a lot of who, which is not a research organisation, and does not show itself as wanting to become one.

So I think a better way of handling this section might be to say that if there is evidence of an effective strategy, for the setting and problem at which the guideline is aimed, that strategy should be used to implement the guideline, and an observational, study, maybe an its should be done to look at population impact. If there is no evidence on how to implement this particular type of guideline, on this type of problem, in this type of setting, then its all guesswork as to what strategy will work, and a pilot implementation phase, designed as research will be needed to figure out how to do the implementation. I think his paper should give reassuring advice on how to get that done, as who does not have much capacity to do it.

The last sentence in the paper addresses this issue as well, but I think misstates it- the problem is not one of collecting valid data, the problem is one of designing valid controlled studies to evaluate impact.

Who is going to do that? Its unlikely to be WHO, so some ideas on this might be welcome.

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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.