Reviewer’s report

Title: Potential benefits of using a toolkit developed to aid in the adaptation of HTA reports: A case study considering positron emission tomography (PET) and Hodgkin’s Disease

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Reviewer: Finn Boerlum Kristensen

Reviewer’s report:

The scientific message of this research is that HTA reports published over 9 years in the English language addressed issues of technology use and development, safety, efficacy and effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and sometimes organisational aspects and thus could have been subjected to a process of adaptation - using a newly developed toolkit, had that existed - in order to increase efficiency in production and avoid duplication.

Review:

This work builds on a search of the HTA database which authors in the discussion state would include all HTA reports published by INAHTA members. Unfortunately this is not the case. Not all INAHTA members contribute their reports to the database, which also includes reports from other institutions, e.g. ICES.

For the objective of this work it would be of importance for readers to know about the Briefs and Checklists that INAHTA members should make for each entry to the database – as these include information that is similar to what the tool referred to will bring about.

Reference is given to Hojgaard, but not to the correspondence with INAHTA that this lead to – and the key issue raised by Hojgaard are not addressed.

“Given that HTA reports on the use of clinical PET have reached such different conclusions despite using the same materials and methods, their reliability must be questioned. If one were to take a scientific approach to this outcome, the reports would either be characterised as fraud or the methodology would be called useless and abandoned very quickly.

As regards the HTA methodology, how to rate the relative importance of each of the four issues addressed (technology, the patient, the economy and the organisation) remains poorly defined. It is only in the field of PET that so many reports are available on the same new
methodology. Whether reports on other issues might be more consistent and reproducible has not been established. The observed lack of reproducibility regarding PET might cast doubt on the reliability of all HTA reports. However, it is also possible that the uncertainties and problems in evaluating the efficacy of new diagnostic imaging tests and the lack of proper research studies with large patient databases in this field are specific to PET, so that such reports are more trustworthy in other areas.” Hogaard

This work does not include any analytical work to test the applicability of the adaptation tool beyond the level of reporting which of five domains were covered in reports (which is mere confirmation that these were HTA reports (and not e.g. systematic reviews or economic studies only) . The manuscript does not address a pertinent issue of the development of the technology (from issues of PET scanning devices to combination with CT scanning over the years) and the contribution of new research including research into the dyad diagnosis + therapeutic follow-up to get closer to clinical effectiveness that happened over the nine years. The field of PET in oncology has a number of key problems like what is efficacy and effectiveness when it comes to diagnosis (Fryback & Thornbury in INAHTA reply to Hojgaard). A key question that a reader would ask is: In a field with rapid development, with fundamental discussions of validity of HTA reports that were sometimes key elements of evidence-base in other reports would an adaptation toolkit work at all?

Other issues:

No contacts to institutions were made to get non feely accessible reports from Internet – this would not have been a big investment of time.

Links should be validated – several do not work

Are there more recent references to the EUnetHTA available?

The text is somewhat redundant when it comes to introduction and discussion, and could be improved by some shortening. Several text editing issues were identified..

Conclusion:

The scientific value of the manuscript is limited and it presents as an interesting hypothesis that the tool could be applied. As such it would best fit were it the first step in a study that actually reported the testing of the toolkit into the field of PET which has undergone substantial development. Perhaps such research is on the way from the group or done by others?

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'