Reviewer’s report

Title: Prioritization strategies in clinical practice guidelines development: a pilot study

Version: 2 Date: 22 December 2009

Reviewer: Antonio Garcia-Romero

Reviewer’s report:

The piece has been improved but it is still not fit to be printed. The authors have modified the structure and rewritten several sections of the previous version. They also have accomplished some of the main comments. However there are still several important deficiencies that should be corrected and/or justified. In addition, I think some of my recommendations are still unanswered appropriately.

The main value of this paper is that provides a systematic approach to establish criteria for PDT. This contribution must be recognized. Nevertheless, the methodology used is deficient and has important limitations. I think these limitations need to be described in an appropriated way. For instance, in the section “Limitations of our approach”, authors affirm that “we estimate that the reported information was good enough to…” This comment is not a limitation and besides is a subjective opinion. I strongly recommend the authors try to be more self-critical with their study.

The description of the study weaknesses could be very helpful for potential users of this piece of research. It is also highly recommendable that authors justify the decisions adopted and, if possible, that they provide suitable alternatives to improve it. With these modifications, the paper would increase its value as it would provide more useful information to the stakeholders (clinicians, researchers, decision-makers, etc.).

Major compulsory revisions.

In my opinion, there are still three important deficiencies in this version of the paper.

1) The main objective of this study is to develop a systematic approach for PDT that can be reproduced by other researchers. However, this study is difficult to reproduce by other researchers because the methodology is still confusing and not well described. I have to recognize that this study has a methodology quite complex and is difficult to describe it appropriately. However, all the work made in order to do this paper more understandable is highly recommendable.

Authors must pay special attention to the document structure using different criteria such as numbers, upper case letters, roman numbers, etc. I recommend
to the authors that try to standardize these elements and fit them as well as possible to the “Instructions for Health Research Policy and Systems authors”.

I think it could be useful for potential readers to include a brief justification of each step in the methods section. By the way, it is confusing the use of different names given to each part of the methods section (i.e. step, stage, etc.).

2) The authors say that “a scientifically sound method is used to prioritize topics for CPGs”. Nevertheless, there are several methodological decisions that seem to be arbitrary and not very appropriate.

For instance, the authors mention that the external survey was conducted to 90 people comprising all the stakeholders involved. However, they don’t give information about the proportion of each type of respondent. Besides, when the authors talk about the responses (60), they mention that they represent all different types of participants. This is a subjective comment that must be based on statistical tests. Paradoxically, in this study, this type of subjective perceptions coexists with detailed statistical reporting (page 9). The document should have a homogeneous methodological quality.

In addition, the scales used in different parts of the study are ambiguous. For example, you use a scale with labels such as “good quality information”, “moderate quality information”. I wonder if the authors have given explanations to the surveyed about what is good or moderate. The authors give numerical scores to each label in order to make several calculations (i.e. average, etc.). This procedure seems to me not very recommendable.

3) There are several key issues that must be considered. For instance, why do you include a description of factorial analysis in the results section? In order to enrich the findings of this study, the authors should state some hypotheses. I think it is also necessary to include a brief literature review about this topic.

Minor Essential revisions

1) There are more minor corrections that I don’t consider at this moment until a new version be written by the authors.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.