Reviewer's report

Title: No Short-Cut in Assessing Trial Quality: A Case Study.

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Reviewer: Paul Glasziou

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As this paper shows there are many other concerns beyond what a simple check list will pick up, and that careful detective work may uncover. There are clearly many problems in the reporting of the Burke trial, but it might be noted that the trial report is much shorter than the analysis of it in this paper. My real problem is the difficulty in making global judgement made on these flaws. Many of the "flaws" are trivial, e.g. mistakes in sample size calculation, reporting risk ratios as odds ratios. Neither of these matter in the context of a systematic review.

Given all trials - even the best - have many flaws, what are we to do to judge whether these are serious enough? In particular will the combined flaws lead to a serious bias of the results in one direction or the other? The problem is reflected in the diverse student opinions in Table 3 of this paper. So couldn't the paper also be titled: "No short cut in assessing trial quality but no long-cut either"?