Reviewer's report

Title: Efficacy of prescribed injected diacetylmorphine in the Andalusian trial: responders and non-responders evaluated using a multi domain outcome index

Version: 1 Date: 26 May 2009

Reviewer: Marica Ferri

Reviewer's report:

General comments

I think the authors may devote some lines to discuss way the have chosen the bayesian model to re-analize the data and also they should better clarify the methods section in which:

-the dutch study is given for universally known
-the andalusian study is described as if it was the focus of the present paper.

Interest of the paper: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests.

Recommendation for acceptance: Accept after minor essential revisions (which the authors can be trusted to make)

Abstract

1.( Minor Essential Revisions) The abstract might clearly define the outcomes and the relevant measures. It actually mentions the Dutch study saying that the same multidomain index was adopted, expecting implicitly that the readers are able to identify the publications about the dutch study and to remember the outcomes. I believe an abstract should be kept as simple and straightforward as possible.

2.( Minor Essential Revisions) The results are reported in an unusual way : In all of the scenarios considered, almost the whole distribution of the rates difference (the one for heroin minus methadone) was located to the right of the zero” It sounds puzzling and misleading as the direction of the results in respect of the zero depends on the assumption made by the authors and it is not an absolute result. I therefore would mention the direction of the results in a narrative way letting aside the “zero” description.

3.(Minor Essential Revision) In the conclusion the clause seems to be truncated : “The present analysis suggests a clinical superiority of injected DAM versus for severely affected heroin injectors not benefiting sufficiently from the available treatments.”

Background
4. The authors correctly report some of the criticisms against the adoption of the multidomain index (i.e. the difficulties of attributing a clinical value significant to the patient to a multidomain index and comparing the results across studies) and they say that reproducing them into their study they allow comparabilities among studies.

Methods

5. The methods section briefly introduced the methods for analysing study in the andalusian study and therefore it was stated that the data from a previous study (which one the andalusian or the dutch?) were used for applying the bayesian method. AS I stated in the introduction, it is my opinion that the methods section should be made straightforwader.

6. It is not clear to me the assumption under the choice of 15% a priori minimal difference between the proportion of responders in the 2 groups and how this was considered clinically relevant: "We assumed as clinically relevant a minimal difference of 15% between the rates of responders in each group, and assessed the probability of this being fulfilled under different assumptions."

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I am the author of a cochrane systematic review on the treatment of heroin users with heroin