Reviewer’s report

Title: Clustering in surgical trials - database of intra-cluster correlations

Version: 1 Date: 1 September 2011

Reviewer: David J Torgerson

Reviewer’s report:

The paper reads well and produces valuable information for researchers planning future surgical trials. It is interesting, an predictable, that process measures such as theatre time have much bigger ICCs than quality of life outcomes. These process measures are also cost measures and you might comment in the discussion on the possible issues this might raise for a concurrent economic evaluation. Whilst few trials are powered on economic outcomes anyway your analysis suggests that because ICCs are so high for cost measures then the precision of the economic results are likely to be more affected than clinical outcomes. It might be worth a comment on this in the discussion section. I think it might also be useful, if you've got the resources, to include at the end of the paper a call for people with surgical data to send you their ICCs that could be published on the HSRU website in order to increase the range of ICCs available, as I have used HSRU ICCs for the planning of cluster trials myself and have found it very helpful.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

No I don't have any competing interests.