Reviewer’s report

Title: Forty-five years of schizophrenia trials in Italy: a survey

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Reviewer: Roberta Scherer

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The manuscript by Purgato et al describes the characteristics of 74 trials of schizophrenia conducted in Italy from 1948 through 2009. The authors obtained citations of trials from the Cochrane Schizophrenia’s specialized register of trials, and extracted data on trial duration, number of outcomes, and sample size among other variables. The objective of the study is to characterize the trial activity in Italy during this time period.

The major concern I have with this manuscript is that the authors have not provided an adequate description of the methods. Specifically:

1. When was the Cochrane Schizophrenia Group specialized register searched? When was the register last updated? Does it include only full length publications or does it include any trials identified by grey literature sources? You state that these trials are “reliably indexed regarding the intervention and the number of participants.” Assuming that this is the data you used, what evidence is there that these variables have been correctly identified.

2. What definitions or criteria were used by the individuals screening the search results to say that a specific study was a randomized or controlled clinical trial? How did you handle trials comparing a pharmaceutical to a different type of intervention (e.g., behavioral therapy)? How did you define an “Italian” trial? Did all centers (including a coordinating center, if multi-centered) need to be Italian, or did only the persons actually enrolling and treating study participants need to be in Italy?

3. How was the data abstracted - on paper forms or electronically? In what format was the data stored for analyses? What do you mean by “reliability check”? A reliability check could mean anything from double data extraction to a 10% review of the previous extraction. Also, please provide more detail about what data were extracted and how they were extracted. How were drugs classified? How was “diagnostic criteria” defined? How was an outcome defined? For example, one can count the same determinant measured at three time points as one outcome or as three outcomes. Also in the results, you present information on additional variables (e.g., duration, randomisation, blinding, type drug, etc.) Were these abstracted or simply garnered from the specialized register? If extracted, state how defined.

4. What software was used for analyses?
5. For Figure 1, please indicate reasons records were excluded. Why were they ineligible? What does “not relevant” mean? Also, what does “wrong” diagnoses, design, comparison mean? Instead of saying it was wrong, say what they were.

6. Because the quality of trials have changed over time, it would be useful to present the number of trials published per time interval, or prepare a graph showing cumulative publication from 1948 through 2009.

7. I did not find the map of Italy with numbers of trial per site particularly useful, as the information is already presented in Table 1. Is there a reason to show the trials by site? If so, please elaborate.

8. Although you present information on randomisation and blinding, there is almost no discussion of quality in reference to other studies that have addressed trial quality.

9. You need to justify more fully or explain in greater detail why these analyses are of importance to the general scientific community. How does the number and quality of trials in Italy compare with other countries? What recommendations would the authors have for Italian trialists? Although the authors state their views on this in the conclusion, they do not address it in the discussion at all.

**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’