Reviewer's report

**Title:** Rationality versus Reality: The Challenges of Evidence-Based Decision Making For Health Policy Makers

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 20 July 2009

**Reviewer:** John N Lavis

**Reviewer's report:**

The paper is much improved in how it recognizes the contributions that many other disciplines have made to our understanding of the policymaking process and the role of research evidence in it. I continue to find the review to be a helpful, concise summary of the field (albeit as someone who doesn't know this particular literature in detail).

I have only one major comment about this version of the paper. While the 'policy enhancement strategies' are starting to get more concrete, the current list contains a number of entries that are hard to square with the realities of existing political institutions and processes. For example, do we really want to 'minimize political orientations'? Aren’t political orientations what we’re using (in part) as the basis for our voting? And do we need ‘performance review systems’ for politicians? Isn’t that what elections are for? Also, how do ‘Delphi decision-making processes’ work for anything besides highly routinizable decisions like coverage decisions? Are House committees, and many other political bodies, expected to give up their authority to such processes? This list of strategies could be so helpful to readers that I very much hope the authors will take one last stab at it!

I have one minor comment about this version of the paper. While the most distracting elements of the ‘straw person’ argument have been removed, there are still a number of phrases that will distract groups that could learn a great deal from what the authors have written. I understand the rationale (articulated in the comments to reviewers’ feedback) for continuing to ground the paper in relation to EBDM, but to equate (as on page 5) the rational decision model with EBDM and to support this statement with two non-health-related citations and only one health-related citation from Dan Fox of all people (who has always cried out for a recognition of the fundamentally political nature of decision-making) seems unfair. Similarly, phrases like ‘simplistic assumptions’ (page 12) could simply be written as ‘assumptions.’

I also noticed a few minor points that the authors may want to consider:

1. On page 5, the authors may wish to drop ‘and biases’ (stakeholders have influences on decision-making but why are their perspectives deemed to be biased?); and
2. On page 21, the authors may wish to drop the adjective ‘global’ (I don’t think
there are global healthcare systems, just a variety of healthcare systems across the globe).

**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.