Reviewer's report

**Title:** The updating of clinical practice guidelines: insights from an international survey

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 24 June 2010

**Reviewer:** Tari Turner

**Reviewer's report:**

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   Yes
   
   Updating guidelines is an important and interesting issue and this paper makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the updating processes currently being used.
   
   The authors state that they sought to identify “best practice” in updating, however while the results of the survey report current practice, the paper does not justify why this is “best practice”. Is the suggestion that the organizations surveyed are likely to be leading the way in rigour of updating? If so, perhaps this could be stated and supported.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
   Mostly.
   
   Development of the survey is well described and appropriate. Methods for the quantitative aspects of the analysis are appropriately described. The methods of analysis of qualitative data are only described in a very limited way, which would not enable replication, and this substantially reduces the usefulness of this data.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
   Mostly.
   
   The relatively low response rate is a major potential source of bias, however the authors note this, and appropriately explore the differences between the responders and non-responders.
   
   While the Methods reports that the qualitative data were coded, the resulting themes are not presented or discussed. There is no reporting of how many respondents completed the open questions and the degree of similarity or variability within this data. It is not clear the extent to which the quotes presented reflect the overall sense from the qualitative data, or whether these were isolated sentiments. There is no synthesis or interpretation of the qualitative data presented.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes – except that there is no mention of ethics approval and a lack of detail about qualitative methods.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes, however I am not sure that the statement in the Conclusion of the Abstract “Guideline updating has been performed less rigorously than guideline development ‘de novo’” can be supported from this data, especially as there has been (and continues to be) substantial ‘de novo’ development of very low quality guidelines.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

7. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. More information is needed about the methods of analysis of the qualitative data, the amount of data which was received and the resulting themes and interpretation of this data. This is both essential to understanding this data, and would also substantially enrich the paper and increase its contribution to our understanding of the process, barriers and enablers of CPG updating.

2. Justification is needed of how the survey identifies “best practice” rather than “current practice” in updating.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Mention should be made of ethics approval if any, and reasons it was not sought if not.

2. In the Methods section of the Abstract the numbers of institutions surveyed (70 members of the Guidelines International Network who declared developing CPGs; 37 institutions included in the U.S. National Guideline Clearinghouse database that published more than 20 CPGs; and 7 institutions selected by an expert committee) do not add to the total number given (106). This should be explained.

3. In the text of Results section, explanation should be given of why 8 of the original 114 institutions were not contacted.

4. The Results section of the Abstract states that 67 questionnaires were returned, however the main Results section states that replies were received from 44 institutions. This should be clarified.
5. It would be clearer to state in the text that 5 surveys were excluded because >20% of questions were unanswered (as per the figure) rather than that they were not “completed appropriately”.

6. On page 8 the authors state that “Twenty institutions (56%) ran the original search strategies and did additional horizon scanning, fourteen institutions (40%) used more specific strategies than the original strategies, and seven (20%) institutions ran other searches.” While the table helps understand this, explanation of how to interpret these figures, given they do not tally to 100%, would be useful.

7. It would be useful to explain why the number of organizations included varies between 39 (tables 1 and 5) and 36 (tables 2, 3 & 4).

Discretionary Revisions

1. It would be useful to have some discussion of whether any of the organizations made available the details of their updating processes.

2. It might be helpful for figure 2 and table 2 to be labeled “included organizations” or similar to highlight that these are those organizations whose data was included in the analysis, rather than all those surveyed.

**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