Reviewer's report

Title: Developing a decision aid to guide public sector health policy decisions: A study protocol

Version: 3 Date: 2 February 2011

Reviewer: Tania Stafinski

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1. The instruction from the journal states that a detailed account of the hypothesis be provided. I can’t seem find a hypothesis in this protocol. The objective seems to be the initial development of a decision aid for health policy makers.

2. Ref 10 (on page 5) is a Lavis et al article (not Oxman et al), and is a single reference. The statement on page 5 (lines 85 to 89) refers to “A recent series of articles..” Which is the correct reference?

3. The description of what the components of a decision aid might be appear vague. As a result, it is not clear how they will proceed with conducting a comprehensive and systematic search for looking for published and grey literature. It might be easier to use a focus group to identify these components or dimensions.

4. The Methods section is quite general and unbounded. “Research traditions” can be very broad and will likely yield numerous “key themes”. Some discussion of how the authors plan on narrowing them down to a manageable, yet meaningful number would be helpful.

5. What will be included in “health policy”? Again, this is a fairly vast area, with different types of decisions occurring at different levels of public policy. Therefore, it would be great to see some discussion of the explicit types of health policy this study seeks to inform. Since the focus groups and the Delphi rounds will involve CRC folks, perhaps the focus, from the outset, should be on screening decisions and the importance of understanding how values and other non-research based information might be incorporated into these decisions.

6. How the authors plan on addressing the specific descriptive (how things are done) and normative (how they should be done) questions seems unclear. A more detailed explanation of how such information will be obtained from their surveys, etc. would be helpful. It would be nice to see copies of the survey tools and facilitator’s instructions for the focus groups.

7. The three types of methods might, in a general sense, help answer the questions presented in the protocol. However, the protocol lacks sufficient detail to be able to connect the separate parts of the methods proposed to the 3 research questions.

8. In summary, this protocol will likely require substantial revisions in order for it to appear clear and rigorous in its approach to addressing the research
questions. The authors might also want to consider limiting themselves to screening policies, which would seem more convincing, given the methods presented.