Reviewer's report

Title: Overview of the effectiveness of reminders in improving professional behaviour

Version: 1 Date: 29 February 2012

Reviewer: Mark Petticrew

Reviewer's report:

Major revisions
I thought this was interesting and worth doing and my main comments relate to the need for more clarity about the potential biases introduced by doing a review of reviews like this. Also, because we are at one additional remove from the primary studies, some of the basic contextual information is missing, like what the settings for the primary studies is, and what the study designs are of the primary studies that are included in the reviews. Presumably this basic descriptive information about the original studies is available in the reviews themselves, but by the time we get to reviews of reviews, it is lost and “the evidence of effectiveness” starts to look quite abstract. So in short it would be useful to know a little more about the original studies.

The overlap issue is a major one, and the combination of this and votecounting has the potential to introduce significant bias. For the reader however this is difficult to judge, as we are not given much information on the actual extent of the overlaps. What exactly is the overlap between the high-quality reviews in terms of their primary studies? Is doublecounting really a problem? At worst, exactly the same studies appear in all the reviews; at best, there is no overlap. Presumably the truth lies somewhere in between... but we are not told. For example, there is a risk that “popular” interventions are more likely to be subject to repeated evaluations, and appear in several reviews, so the evidence for those (based on votecounting) will appear to be stronger than it really is. I felt that the paper needs to this in more detail so as to give the reader a better sense of what if any bias is being introduced.

Minor revisions: None

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'