Reviewer's report

Title: Military veterans with mental health problems: a protocol for a systematic review to identify whether they have an additional risk of contact with criminal justice systems compared with other veterans groups.

Version: 1 Date: 6 October 2012

Reviewer: Paul Shekelle

Reviewer's report:

This is a nicely written and referenced protocol for assessing a topic of interest, certainly here in the USA and presumably in the UK and other countries that share some elements of a common culture. I have only a few minor suggestions for the authors to consider, which are not mandatory but for informational purposes only, upon which they may wish to elaborate in their protocol.

1. The authors have a list of ICD 10 codes that are going to “count” as their mental health diagnoses of interest. But they are going to be identifying studies that go back in time, potentially far back in time, to times that pre-date ICD 10 (or 9 or even earlier) and have they thought through how they are going “cross walk” these diagnostic codes back through time?

2. I suspect the ways that different studies identify substance use/abuse and alcohol use/abuse are going to vary substantially: ever vs never, some amount vs some lesser amount, or grades of different amounts. I suspect that trying to specify in advance exactly how they are going to try and classify these such that results can be assessed across studies is impractical, but once they have a look at the many different ways this is done in the studies they have they may wish to write down how this will be done, before actually doing any of the analyses, to help prevent inadvertent post hoc changes in how studies are classified once preliminary results are known.

3. In the analytic section, it was a little unclear to me if everything was going to be direct comparisons (as in their reference 46, where the study compares within the same study sample the risk of incarceration by mental health and substance abuse variables) or whether they were also going to be making indirect comparisons, where one study will report the proportions of mental health disorders in one population, and another study will be reporting proportions of mental health disorders in an incarcerated population, and then these two would be compared.

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:**

None