Reviewer’s report

Title: Cochrane search strategy was optimum method to conduct a psychometric diagnostic test accuracy review in postnatal depression: a comparison of three alternative strategies

Version: 2 Date: 30 May 2011

Reviewer: Becky Skidmore

Reviewer’s report:

This is a nicely done, succinct article that reports on a comparison of three different search strategies for conducting a psychometric diagnostic test accuracy review in the area of postnatal depression. The background and rationale for the study are well articulated. It was useful to point out the potential benefits of the Cochrane recommended strategy as a brief and relatively simple method to adopt that could be applied to multiple databases. The article is also well researched with an extensive bibliography.

The challenges of searching for diagnostic test accuracy studies are well known. The authors rightfully explore the application of the recommended Cochrane method within a defined area of study that is distinct from studies done thus far. Their findings provide useful knowledge and direction to future researchers in this area.

Methods adopted for exploring the question are appropriate and well described. The Venn diagram provides a nice visual summary of the data. The authors also acknowledge potential limitations to their study and its findings but also place these limitations in context (e.g., minimal DTA reviews of psychometric measures for postnatal depression).

Discretionary Improvements / Minor Comments:

1. There are some instances of subject/verb agreement (singular/plural):

   e.g.,
   p. 3
   An important contribution to the debate on search filters, by Whiting et al (2010) [7] comprised a substantial review, which sought to clarify the use of search filters by evaluating if an optimum search strategy for retrieval of DTA studies were was available.

   p. 4
   Reference set
   Inclusion criteria consisted of primary studies which examined the brief
case-finding questions (Table 1) in a postnatal population, where the accuracy of these questions were was compared to a gold standard or ‘reference’ standard test. A total of six studies which used the case finding questions for PND were was identified and included in the reference set [20-25].

p. 5

Analysis

therefore total number of citation records retrieved by each alternative search strategy and number of missed papers is are provided.

Due to the small number of studies in the reference set, formal calculation of sensitivity and precision were was not undertaken.

2. I found these two sentences awkwardly worded:

The Cochrane recommended search strategy with no filter terms included, only terms for the target condition (PND) and the index test (the questions), did not suffer loss of relevant studies. (maybe leave out the phrase between the commas)

This was a small exploratory study and limitations include only one electronic database was searched, in addition the reference set of studies was retrieved from a forward citation search, which may not be considered an adequate ‘gold standard’ to compare the results of the three search strategies. (maybe split into two or three sentences and rework phrasing)

3. It might be nice to mention a recent and very positive development with Elsevier regarding the introduction of a new EMTREE - Diagnostic Test Accuracy Study – January 1, 2011, which will improve the identification of such studies at least in EMBASE.

4. Appendix

Would be nice to see numbers retrieved by each line of the search, not just the strategy (although final numbers are reported in the text)

5. Bibliography:

Some in press items have been published.

e.g.,


There are some small inconsistencies in formatting that trust will be addressed in final (e.g., italics, upper/lower case)

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Skidmore

**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