Reviewer’s report

**Title:** A methodological survey of the analysis, reporting and interpretation of Absolute Risk Reduction in systematic reviews (ARROW): a study protocol

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 22 October 2013

**Reviewer:** Devan Kansagara

**Reviewer’s report:**

This manuscript describes a protocol for a study examining effect estimate reporting practices in systematic reviews. This is an important topic and study findings will be valuable to the systematic review community. Generally, the proposed study design is methodologically sound. The manuscript could be improved in the following ways:

1) There are two key opportunities to report effect estimates in a review: in the description of results from individual studies, and in the synthesis of results from all studies. It is hard to follow in the manuscript how the protocol applies to each of these steps. Conceivably, a review could calculate and present absolute effects for each individual study in a table, but then only report relative effects in the meta-analysis. It would be useful to be explicit about these categories – this may help the clarity of results presentation from your study.

2) From my reading of the proposed methods, you will be including reviews with and without meta-analysis. Following from the prior point, the issues of effect estimate reporting seem like they might be a bit different for meta-analyses than they would for reviews without meta-analysis. You might consider reporting results separately for meta-analyses and qualitative reviews. You might also consider stratifying study selection process such that you randomly selected from amongst a group a meta-analyses and then a group of qualitative reviews.

3) The framing of the study rationale could be stronger. I would suggest being more explicit about what “ideal” reporting would look like – again, there are several types of reporting I think you are covering—individual study reporting, benefit/harm reporting comparison, and summary table reporting. For the latter issue, you describe in paragraph 5 of the introduction what the ideal should be, but it is hard in subsequent sections which aspects of data gathering apply to this description – I think you are referring to this approach when you say “modeled from baseline risk” (bottom page 7) but it is a bit hard to follow. I would suggest being very clear in the introduction about the ideal, for example – 1) reviews should present absolute effects when describing individual studies, 2) reviews should use a “complementary approach” (or whatever label you have for this) in reporting summary effects in which relative effects are described in comparison to baseline risk, and 3) there should not be discrepancies in effect reporting for benefits and harms.

4) Page 7 – study characteristics – how did you define “high-impact journal”?
5) Please review manuscript for grammar – there are several awkward phrases throughout (for example, page 7 third paragraph; page 8 fourth paragraph).

6) Page 10 – the previous section largely reiterates the introduction – either shorten this section, or the introduction.