Reviewer's report

Title: Strategies for obtaining unpublished drug trial data: A qualitative interview study

Version: 1 Date: 13 February 2013

Reviewer: Frank Peinemann

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Major Compulsory Revisions
I perceive the manuscript mainly as a compilation of statements by authors of systematic reviews on the nature and handling of unpublished study data. I have the impression that some statements could be regarded as beliefs about others and even imputations aimed at other persons.

The contents reflect some of the daily routine associated with the conducting of systematic reviews.

The search for and description of unpublished studies is very important to get a better picture of all efforts completed or ongoing to investigate an intervention. The knowledge of unpublished studies could relativize the conclusion of a report and could create hints at differences between published and unpublished trials.

On the other hand, results from analyses conducted before the planned end of an observation period or before the planned number of participants has been recruited may be associated with an additional risk of bias. Interim reports and early discontinuation are examples of unfinished data analysis. A large proportion of unpublished studies may fall into this category. The question arises whether these data decrease or increase the risk of bias already possibly inherent in the included published studies of a systematic review. Should the data really be included if available? I think that this issue could be discussed.

Minor Essential Revisions
I would be interested if Cochrane authors had different problems, experiences, or opinions than Non-Cochrane authors. The authors of the present manuscript included 16 authors of Cochrane reviews and 16 authors of other reviews but I could not find a statement describing the difference between both groups. I would expect Cochrane authors to be specifically educated because of a prestructured template, strict rules, and a supportive review group provided by the Cochrane Collaboration.

Discretionary Revisions
Reading of the could be facilitated by providing a flow-chart or a little bit clearer description of searching and including authors: number of contacted persons; number of eligible authors, separate for Cochrane authors and authors of other reviews.
**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