Author’s response to reviews

Title: Screening for cervical cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis

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Version: 5 Date: 26 April 2013

Author’s response to reviews: see over
April 26, 2013

Re: Revision of MS: 1089882605841993
Screening for cervical cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis
Leslea Peirson, Donna Fitzpatrick-Lewis, Donna Ciliska, Rachel Warren

Dear Drs. Moher, Shekelle and Stewart

As the Editors-In-Chief, we are pleased to re-submit to you the attached manuscript “Screening for cervical cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis” for possible publication in Systematic Reviews Journal.

The Handling Editor provided two final comments that we used to inform revisions to the manuscript. In the table below we provide details that explain how the revisions have addressed the issues raised by the Handling Editor.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Leslea Peirson, PhD

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Summary of Revisions to Manuscript: 1089882605841993
Screening for cervical cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis
Leslea Peirson, Donna Fitzpatrick-Lewis, Donna Ciliska, Rachel Warren

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<th>Handling Editor</th>
<th>Revision Made</th>
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<td>Although one should not expect a lot of new evidence published since the last year, the search for this manuscript is one year old and needs to be updated to see if there have been published new relevant studies.</td>
<td>When the manuscript was first submitted to SRJ for review in November 2012 the search was only 6 months old. In November, shortly after submitting the manuscript and just prior to the release of the guideline we conducted a focused search of PubMed specifically for RCTs on cervical screening. No new studies were located that met the inclusion criteria for the review. We added a statement in the search strategy portion of the Methods section (p. 6) to indicate this search was conducted and a statement in the study selection portion of the Results section (pp. 7-8) to indicate no new relevant RCTs were located.</td>
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| In the methods section, the authors state that they had performed sensitivity/subgroup analysis to explain/explore factors (e.g., study designs, populations, interventions, organized vs. opportunistic approaches, length of exposure to screening) that might account for the variation in the effect estimates in the pooled analysis they presented (i.e., heterogeneity of Chi2=50.98, df=12, p<0.00001; I2=76%). The manuscript is missing this information. Will the authors present any data (e.g., subgroup forest plots, text) on this analysis in the results section? What were the factors in their opinion that could explain this variation in the effects across the pooled studies? The fact of overlapping confidence intervals is not a strong justification allowing us to discount the extent of the observed heterogeneity without exploring underlying factors for this significant heterogeneity. The explanation that “The variability is likely due to small versus large treatment effects observed across studies” is unsatisfactory because it does not offer what were the likely sources of this variability. Although it is a post-hoc analysis, one would at least look if there is any subgroup effect according to the pre-specified factors. If the heterogeneity cannot be readily explained by the explored factors, it needs to be stated in the results section, and mentioned in the discussion section as a limitation. | p. 7 Added “contextually and clinically important” to the description of factors included in the post-hoc sensitivity analyses  
pp. 10-11 Results section text revised to include data for the sensitivity analyses; subgroup analysis of studies conducted in generalizable vs. less generalizable countries showed moderate heterogeneity (I²=55.9%); all other analyses showed minimal (I²=21.6%) or no (I²=0%) heterogeneity.  
p. 14 Added statement to limitations section to indicate that sensitivity analyses were, for the most part, unable to explain the variation in the effects across the pooled studies  
p. 30 Revised footnote “o” in Table 4 to provide details regarding sensitivity analyses |