Reviewer's report

Title: Opioids for chronic non-cancer pain: a protocol for a systematic review of randomized controlled trials

Version: 1 Date: 7 June 2013

Reviewer: D Moore

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This work is on an important topic and likely to be of wide interest.
The authors have prepared a long, detailed and informative protocol.

Comments:

1. Background: The background section is potentially a little too Canada centric in places. (Discretionary Revision)

2. Limitations of Current Evidence: point 2: Use of “currently”. It is unclear whether this point is referring to the omission of studies only available at the time of the review or more recently published studies. (Minor Essential Revision)

3. Limitations of Current Evidence: point 5: An important point is made about the use of the Jadad tool. However, the review could be viewed as being “of its time”, particularly as references supporting the point are all published after the review. (Discretionary Revision)

4. Methods – Eligibility Criteria: How will the range of chronic conditions (including remitting-relapsing symptoms) be defined for the purpose of selection. Terms for some of these are included in the search strategy – how/why were these decided upon. Are subgroup analyses planned around underlying conditions? (Minor Essential Revision)

5. Methods – Meta-analysis: The sentence on baseline risk seems somewhat isolated and the point being made is unclear. Also how would the observational evidence be identified/selected? (Minor Essential Revision)

6. Methods – Meta-analysis – last sentence: It is unclear how the MIDs will be identified. (Minor Essential Revision)

7. Methods - Conversion to interpretable units (and beyond): There are two identical sub-headings related to conversion to interpretable units. The presentation of these headings, the sections of related text and their relationship to each other, figure 1 and other parts of the methods section requires considerable clarification. (Major Compulsory Revision)

8. Methods - Conversion to interpretable units (and beyond): It is not clear how much of the information presented in both sections on conversion to interpretable units is related to or reproduced from the methodological papers (refs 38, 48, 49) by the same authors. Given the length of the article and the point immediately above also about this section, the authors should consider revising the text on these pages; where possible, referring to existing publications for deep detail of
methods and retaining only the essence of such methods in the text to aid comprehension. (Minor Essential Revision)

9. Methods – Addressing missing participant data: The implicit assumption(s) underpinning the application of missing data analysis to only significant treatment effects should be stated. Brief mention of how thresholds for important missing data will be determined would be helpful. (Minor Essential Revision)

10. Methods – Knowledge translation: Will patients/the public be involved in the research and the dissemination activities etc.? (Minor Essential Revision)

11. Reference list: Several references are missing important information e.g. last accessed dates for web sources; identifying source (e.g.40) etc.. (Minor Essential Revision)

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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