Reviewer's report

Title: Self-collected versus clinician-collected sampling for sexually transmitted infections: A systemic review and meta-analysis protocol

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Reviewer: Paul Shekelle

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I've reviewed this and it is acceptable for publication as is. However, the authors may wish to consider the following as they undertake their review.

One of the key issues in diagnostic test studies is the spectrum of subjects being assessed, and how this compares to the target population for use of the diagnostic test. In this case, the authors state that one of the advantages of the self-collected method is that it will be more acceptable to "individuals refusing a physical examination" and populations in rural and remote settings. Self-collection of STI samples is by definition operator-dependent, and I would hypothesize that individuals who refuse to have physical examinations may vary from the general population in their technique of sticking swabs into various private orifices of their body. It is very difficult for me to easily accept that the results of the sensitivity and specificity of self-collection compared to physician-collected specimens among urban-living young men enrolled in a clinical trial are going to be the same when the population to whom this test may then be used is going to be young women who refuse physical examination due to religious reasons. Therefore, there is going to need to be some assessment of the applicability of the study populations to the "individuals refusing a physical examination" and the "hard-to-reach populations" and "rural or remote populations" for whom this self-collection method is postulated to provide the advantage. Such an assessment is part of the QUADAS, but right now the listed variables to be abstracted from the studies doesn't include anything like it - only "gender and age" of the participants and "location of self-collection (home, clinic etc.)". I think this is going to need to be expanded substantially if the results of this systematic review are going to be useful in making practice and policy decisions.