Reviewer's report

Title: Impact of contacting study authors: a systematic review of diagnostic accuracy studies for hepatic fibrosis

Version: 1 Date: 12 May 2014

Reviewer: Nicole Wolfe

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

- Lines 213-216, sentence, “No test for which we obtained additional data was originally rated low strength of evidence and the test for which we received the most additional data (APRI) was already rated high strength of evidence.” This sentence is awkward and confusing and needs to be rewritten as at least two sentences.

- Lines 219-221 – “We were able to contact the majority of authors (68%), a response rate that is close to[89] or above[1] the response rates reported in previous studies.” This sentence is conflating your rate of contacting authors with your response rate, which is the response you get back from authors. This needs to be divided into two (or more) sentences. One sentence that describes how many authors you were able to contact. Another sentence that describes the response rate from those authors. Yes, you got a 64% response rate, but that is only from those you could contact (45/66), which is still approx 2/3 of the original sample of 66 authors. The data you received represents 28 out of the original sample of 66 authors, which is 42%. This needs to be stated clearly in the paper.

- A Flow chart of the authors contacted and who ultimately provided information would be helpful – number contacted, number who contacted you back, number who forwarded you onto a colleague, number who provided information following each round of e-mails/calls. A visual would be helpful here

- Lines 221-222 – Did the authors tell you they would comply if they had the data or are you making that assumption? Using the phrase “would have likely complied” does not sound definitive, but subjective.

- Contacting Authors Section - Minimum number of days? Was there a maximum? It should be clear on which day you contacted the study authors. Was it on the 10th business day? The standardization and uniformity of how you contacted authors should be clearer. The term “minimum” makes it sound discretionary, not systematic

- Methods Section - All of the included studies were from a previous review that is two years old. Was another search done to see if there were any newer studies that could be included in this review that were not available during the first review? It would be helpful to have more details about your methods.

- You should mention that you contacted authors around the world. Were publications English only, or were some authors contacted in their native
language? You do mention that language barrier prevented meaningful telephone contact (line 182). Were these the corresponding authors? Were they e-mailed in English? This needs to be clarified

Minor Essential Revisions

- Punctuation should come after the citation. Throughout the paper, there are punctuation problems. In some instances the punctuation is after the citation and in some cases not. This needs to be made consistent throughout.
- Line #249 – The word “publicly” is misspelled. You have it spelled “publically”

Discretionary Revisions

- At the end you talk about a requirement for authors. What about requiring authors to make their data sets publicly available to researchers?
- Is there any reason to believe that researchers in another field might have more access to/control over/willingness to share their data? Or do you feel that your study sample is representative?

**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