Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Roberta Scherer

Reviewer's report:

In this manuscript, the authors describe their efforts to contact 66 authors of diagnostic accuracy studies for clarification of discrepant results or missing data reported in a paper included in a systematic review of diagnostic accuracy studies for hepatic fibrosis. Frequently the information needed to conduct a systematic review cannot be obtained from the primary source and so the reviewers need to contact the study authors. Whether this is a good use of time and effort as not been studied systematically for reviews of diagnostic test accuracy to my knowledge and so this study adds to the methodological literature.

Major compulsory revisions

1. I am somewhat concerned that this paper appears to be almost identical to the white paper that the authors cited (Selph S, Chou R: Impact of Contacting Study Authors on Systematic Review Conclusions: Diagnostic Tests for Hepatic Fibrosis. Research White Paper. (Prepared by the Pacific Northwest Evidence-based Practice Center under Contract No. 290-2012-00014-I). AHRQ Publication No. 14-EHC004-EF. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; April 2014). They even cite themselves for the data they present within this manuscript (line 206). I am unsure whether the journal considers this a duplicate publication because it is a white paper and not a journal article. Clarification is necessary. If it is allowed, then the authors should state upfront that some of these results have been presented previously.

2. The results of the effort to contact authors on pages 7-8 is quite difficult to read, especially because sometimes the authors refer to investigators and sometimes to studies. The numbers do not always match the numbers of citations (e.g., line 175-176 says 22 studies, but has 23 citations and line 178 says 10 investigators with 11 citations). I suggest that a flow chart with both investigators and studies counted along with the responses would make this much easier to read – and allow the reader to easily compare the responses to the two types of information requested.

3. There is no limitation nor recommendation section in the discussion. The recommendations in the conclusion are aimed at study investigators – what conclusions are there for persons doing systematic reviews?

Minor compulsory revisions
1. Table 1 would be improved by including the number of authors contacted in addition to the number providing data.

2. The five authors with language problems – were they even contacted? If not, should they be in the denominator?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'