Reviewer's report

Title: Failure or success of search strategies to identify adverse effects of medical devices: a case study systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 10 September 2014

Reviewer: Yoon Kong Loke

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to look at this interesting work. I only have a few minor comments regarding this straightforward study, which is based on established methods.

1. The Introduction could be improved by adding a couple of sentences explaining why adverse effects of medical devices might be an important healthcare topic.

2. Methods - perhaps a brief clarification to say that studies were identified through searching for intervention and disease condition (spinal fusion), and no adverse effects terms were used. However, this may miss adverse effects of the intervention when used in other bone conditions, or when the spinal fusion was not mentioned.

3. Adverse effects terms - I have some difficulty judging the item 2. which relates to specific adverse events such as swelling, dysphagia etc. Why would anyone key in such search terms for a bone product in spinal fusion? Were these terms mentioned in the manufacturer's product information, or are well-recognized in association with this product? I think there is a major caveat here in that use of specific terms is well and good if the searchers have a clear idea beforehand what are the key events, but it is not helpful for unexpected or new events.

4. The Discussion should point out limitations such as the fact that this product is rather atypical for a device in that it has a pharmaceutical component. Thus the findings may be less generalizable.

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 have been an advisor on the PhD supervisory panel for Dr. Golder and I provided research advice and assistance on her PhD work.