Reviewer's report

Title: Conflicts of Interest and Critiques of the use of Systematic Reviews in Policymaking: An Analysis of Opinion Articles

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Reviewer: Michael Wilson

Reviewer's report:

I found this to be an interesting article to read. The role of COI and industry ties and their influence in the literature is important, and this seems to be the first systematic analysis related to their role in arguments for and against using systematic reviews to inform policy. I think this will be a unique contribution to the literature that can certainly help to spur dialogue, reflection and (hopefully) action on several fronts (e.g., addressing the lack of COI and industry ties in commentaries/editorials). I also thought the conclusion section provided a number of important implications. I have provided some feedback below, which are largely minor concerns.

Major Compulsory Revisions

- There is currently no flow diagram for study selection, which should be included.
- At first it seemed as though this was a systematic review given that the methods are structured around the typical steps taken by a systematic review. In reading the results and reviewing the supplementary file that contained the included articles I was able to quickly note several articles that should have been included (e.g., Lavis JN. Towards systematic reviews that inform health care management and policy-making. PLoS Med 2009 & the SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health Policymaking series led by John Lavis and Andy Oxman in Health Research Policy and Systems…among others that would also be indexed in PubMed). Once I got to the strengths and limitations in the conclusion, the authors do acknowledge that the list of included papers was not comprehensive. I think the lack of comprehensiveness needs to be addressed more explicitly in the objective and/or methods by saying that this cannot be taken as a systematic review but rather an analysis of a representative sample of articles.
- p.6: the list of articles excluded because of language should either be cited or listed in the supplementary file.

Minor Essential Revisions

- p. 3: The sentence starting with “While some authors argue that systematic reviews are the highest form…” should have citations to support the assertion that authors have made the arguments listed.
- p.4, first sentence of the 1st paragraph: would be helpful to indicate that
systematic reviews include both quantitative and qualitative primary research (and the latter is often argued to be particularly helpful methodological development for supporting evidence-informed policy given that it helps to answer the some of the types of questions that policymakers often ask).

- p.4, same paragraph: related to the previous comment, I found the content to be very focused on reviews of effects and of a particular methodology whereas many (including this paper) now take alternative approaches to synthesizing evidence (e.g., critical interpretive syntheses). It might be helpful to make note of the range of approaches that are now available for systematically reviewing the literature to address a particular question.

- p.4, 1st paragraph: the second last sentence should be cited since it refers specifically to findings of previous research.

- p.6: the list of exclusion criteria includes “articles that were off-topic”. This is vague and I suggest removing it because the inclusion and exclusion criteria are by definition designed to identify articles that are off topic.

- p.14: I found that the second paragraph under the heading for “utility arguments” seemed to still be methods arguments and it might need to be moved to that section or further clarified.

Discretionary Revisions

- p.6: consider ending the first sentence under the heading for “Coding of articles as supportive or critical of the use of systematic reviews for policymaking” with “to inform policy”.

- p.10: consider moving the descriptions of methods and utility arguments up to follow the 1st sentence of the previous paragraph.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance 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.