Reviewer's report

Title: Assessment of a method to detect signals for updating systematic reviews

Version: 1 Date: 11 December 2013

Reviewer: Yemisi Takwoingi

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Minor Essential Revisions
1. Method – Determining Priority for Updating a CER: Were these assessments purely subjective or was it possible to quantify how much of the CER was out of date? How were changes in the individual conclusions used in making the overall judgement of the priority for updating a report? Was any distinction made between conclusions for primary and secondary objectives?
2. Abstract and Results: Please can the authors provide exact number instead of "nearly or almost 150".
3. Background: "Our method" Is this the method described in Ahmadzai et al. Syst Rev. 2013? It is not clear what this method is. It is not cited (if a publication does exist) or referred to consistently in this manuscript.
4. Results: instead of "a great majority..." can you be more specific and state frequencies and percentages.
5. Results: There are 2 table 5s. I guess the second one is Table 6 and should say 3x3 table in the text and not 2x2 table as stated.
6. Discussion: instead of "our appendix tables list..." please state which tables because appendix tables 1 to 9 are different. The columns of this other appendix tables are not labelled.
7. Discussion: the paper lacks a clear definition and description of the surveillance signal method as also noted in comment 3 above. Can you be clear about what the method is and what it is called (it will be helpful to readers/users when they refer to your approach). Is the method only applicable to AHRQ CERs or can it be applied to other SRs and if so, how? Please place your findings and approach in the context of other literature.

Discretionary Revisions
8. Abstract background: "methods" stated but only one method, a surveillance system, was assessed.
9. Background: The assessment should not be limited to false negatives but also assessment of false positives. Therefore such a study should include reviews for which signals were detected and those for which no signals were detected.
10. Background: Are the authors aware of the evaluation of other methods by Pattanittum et al. Plos One 2012?
11. Method – search strategy: What was the rationale for selecting the 5 general
medical journals? Were these journals selected because they are top ranking based on their Impact Factor? "Most highly referenced" – can you be more specific or quantify this?

12. Results: For Appendix tables 1 to 9, a single table maybe a neater summary.
13. Results: Please add totals to Table 4.
14. Appendix: the appendix is very long (63 pages). I appreciate the effort to be transparent but is it possible to make Table 10 more concise?

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.