Reviewer's report

Title: An assessment of the efficacy of searching in biomedical databases beyond MEDLINE in identifying studies for a systematic review on ward closures as an infection control intervention to control outbreaks.

Version: 1 Date: 15 September 2014

Reviewer: Connie Schardt

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   The question is well defined and an important question due to the tremendous increase in the number of systematic reviews being developed and published. It should help searcher maximize the efficiency of their searching.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
   Yes, the methods are well defined. This work is limited to one topic and would have to be replicated to help validate their findings. However I question the use of LILACS and IndMED for this search. Having had many years working with Systematic Review teams, these databases never came up as potential sources for a very wide range of clinical questions.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
   Yes, as far as I can tell.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The conclusion validates that one should use the "standard" group of databases for any systematic review - PubMed/MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL and Cochrane Library.
   Hand searching needs to be an important step in the searching process. Additional databases such as IndMed and LILACS, were not useful resources, for this question, at this time in their development.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   Yes.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
   Yes, writing is very clear.
Discretionary Revisions.

I found the paragraph (starting at line 141) explaining the data a bit confusing. The text says that 93 articles were included from Medline but table 1 show 80 included articles from Medline. Table 2 shows the 93, but its not clear - what is the difference between "No included articles retrieved" and "included articles indexed in each database"? Same for EMBASE. I found it confused trying to compare the text to the table. The table may be misleading in the usefulness of Cochrane (I am assuming this is for CENTRAL). The table indicates that you found nothing in Cochrane but what you really want to report is that you found citation but that they were duplicates. For librarians to be able to use this data - it needs to be very clear.

I also stopped briefly at line 131 - "the relative recall was calculated by dividing the number of included citations retrieved from each database by the total number of included articles" - included articles refers to the total number of included articles in the systematic review?

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