Reviewer's report

Title: Integration of Existing Systematic Reviews

Version: 2  Date: 14 February 2014

Reviewer: Mark Newman

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript discusses an important and interesting methodological issue of growing importance into those conducting and using systematic reviews. It is to be hoped that as more systematic reviews become available that these reviews will themselves become important sources of evidence for subsequent reviews that attempt to answer the same or similar research questions. The style of the paper is an expert discussion piece rather than an empirical research report and so I have read in that spirit and these comments reflect that reading. I think the paper would be more helpful to readers if the following style/presentation issues were addressed

1) The general style reads like a report to funders /and or back to a particular group of specific people rather than an article for a wider audience of journal readers. Some of the comments I make below will I think help in this respect

2) More explanation of the context for example what are Evidence based practice Centre’s, why ask these people for their views?

3) A clearer articulation of the what is meant by systematic reviews - From the language used and organizations/ tools mentioned I am guessing that this article means systematic reviews done to answer effectiveness questions i.e. the impact of an intervention on an outcome in a particular group of people compared to a control group of some kind. There are other kinds of systematic reviews for which the issues about using exiting systematic reviews might be different.

4) The paper picks up on most if the issues I could think of but does not explicitly consider the issues(at least I don't think it did) of what counts as a systematic review?. This is of course linked to but not synonymous with quality assessment

5) The discussion of the views of EPC members makes clear that existing systematic reviews can be used for different purposes. However the discussion of methodological issues does not reflect these different purposes clearly. I Think the discussion of methodological discussion reflects the issues of using the results of existing systematic reviews as evidence to answer a research question either solely or as part of a new systematic review. This is fine but I think this should be made clear

6) There is not explicit consideration/discussion of the context in which use of existing systematic reviews takes place. The question of using existing systematic reviews as a source solely, as well as or not at all is relevant to the discussion. There may well be difficulties with using existing systematic reviews but there are also lots of difficulties with carrying out new systematic reviews
from scratch.

7) I would avoid using latin terms.

**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 I have no competing interests