Reviewer's report

Title: Statistical quality of surgical observational studies in medical and surgical journals: protocol for systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 10 March 2014

Reviewer: Mark Rodgers

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1. Is the study design appropriate?
Broadly speaking, it appears to be. Though more clarity about the proposed methods is needed to be certain (see below)

2. Are sufficient details provided to allow replication of the work or comparison with related analyses: if not, what is missing?
This protocol would benefit from greater clarity on the proposed comparison and more detail on the proposed analysis. By the end of the protocol, it was not entirely clear to me whether the authors are proposing to compare the reporting of surgical vs. medical intervention studies, studies of only surgical interventions published in surgical vs. general medical journals, or both of these comparisons.

Greater clarity in description of secondary outcomes on p.7 and the rationale for selecting the sensitivity analyses mentioned on p.9 would be helpful.

A description of the expected output of the analysis and exactly how this will inform the authors objective would be helpful. It is currently unclear what this might consist of, beyond comparing mean scores of statistical reporting quality.

3. Is the planned statistical analysis appropriate?
The authors state that the primary outcome is "percentage of fulfilled criteria" adapted from the SAMPL guidelines. As stated by the authors themselves, not all of the domains will be applicable to all the retrieved studies. Therefore, how will "percentage of fulfilled criteria" be calculated? As a percentage of "applicable" criteria? The number of sub-criteria varies between the domains; how will the weighting of different domains influence the primary outcome (if at all?)

4. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes.