Reviewer's report

Title: A systematic review protocol for measuring comorbidity in inpatient rehabilitation for non-traumatic brain injury

Version: 3  Date: 21 November 2014

Reviewer: Martin Rohling

Reviewer's report:

A systematic review protocol for measuring comorbidity in inpatient rehabilitation for non-traumatic brain injury

Wayne Khuu, Vincy Chan and Angela Colantonio

Systematic Reviews (Submitted: 2014-08-25)

MS ID: 5221445841404559

Thank you for asking me to reexamine this very interesting proposal for Systematic Reviews entitled A Systematic Review Protocol for Measuring Comorbidity in Inpatient Rehabilitation for non-traumatic brain injury, by Khuu, Chan, and Colantonio. I have attempted to answer the questions to which reviewers are directed by the Systematic Reviews editorial staff. As this is a follow-up review, I have taken the time to not only read the authors revised manuscript but their detailed cover letter as well, which contains more explicit comments regarding what I had written in my initial review.

My initial reaction to the authors’ revision is very positive. In fact, I think they have done an excellent job editing their proposal to address my concerns. I also found their arguments regarding why the decided not to change something to be convincing and persuasive.

1. Will the study design adequately test the hypothesis?

I believe the authors have done a good job tightening up their proposal. Furthermore, where it remains a bit vague, they did an excellent job of explaining why they decided to leave their proposal as it was originally written (e.g., excluding stroke). Thus, I think they have a design that will adequately investigate the subject matter. This is not exactly the type of study that easily fits into the “hypotheses-testing” model. Yet, the authors expect to gather valuable information by conducting their review, to which I am now in agreement.

2. Are sufficient details provided to allow replication of the work or comparison with related analyses: if not, what is missing?

The revision does a much better job of explaining the study design and potential analyses that will be needed, depending on what data is gatherable once they dig into the literature. These types of projects are always a bit like opening “Pandora’s Box”. Thus, it is hard to saw with a great deal of certainty what
analyses will be done and how, until some data has been gathered in the early stages of the study. The proposal convinces me that the authors have the knowledge and skill to complete this work into the future, even if they can’t say for certain what will be done a priori.

3. Is the planned statistical analysis appropriate?

As I wrote in response to Item #2, I believe the answer to this question is yes.

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?

I’m not even sure what this question means, but my response is that I do not see any figures that did not appear genuine or manipulated in the authors’ proposal.

5. Is the writing acceptable?

The writing is vastly improved from the first draft and is more than acceptable in explaining the project these authors plan to complete.

I have no recommendations as to changes in the proposal at this time.

**Level of interest:** An exceptional article

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests with the authors or their proposal.