Reviewer’s report

Title: Insufficient uptake of systematic search methods in oncological clinical practice guideline: a systematic review

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Reviewer: Per Olav Vandvik

Reviewer's report:

I read this manuscript with great interest as I have been concerned about the trustworthiness of oncology guidelines, in particular given their lacking inclusion of systematic reviews to inform their recommendations, and availability of fully informative evidence summaries to inform patients and health care professionals about treatment decisions.

The paper contains some interesting findings and is generally well performed in terms of methods for their systematic review. A catchy finding is that only 28% could document appropriate systematic searches together with other findings to further document limitations and some regression analyses pointing to specific problems and trends.

The main findings suggest that the majority of oncology guidelines can not be classified as trustworthy according to standards, unless these by other mechanisms have found a relevant and high-quality up-to-date systematic review to inform recommendations, which precludes the need to do a systematic literature search from start. Whereas this is unlikely it points to the major limitation of the paper which would warrant a major revision in my view, to make it more relevant and newsworthy for the readership of BMJ MRM.

The major limitation in my view relates to the very narrow objective of the paper, focussing solely of systematic searches for literature rather than the appropriate use of systematic reviews to inform recommendations. Although the paper, as mentioned, nicely demonstrates that only 28% performed adequate searches according to the defined standards it does not describe to what extent the guidelines appropriately synthesised the identified studies and ended up using systematic reviews to inform recommendations. This is in my view the key question that this paper ideally should address, which would warrant a major revision. It would require that authors re-assess the guidelines and document for each recommendation to what extent it was based on a systematic review of sufficient quality and to what extent this was communicated to the readers, in terms of evidence summaries providing estimates of effect on benefits and harms and reported quality of evidence. This could be mapped against IOM standards or AGREE II for the evidence part of guidelines. Another limitation is the search which ended in 2015, questioning the extent to which the findings are applicable in 2019, assuming that also oncology guideline organisations may have improved over time.
I would be happy to provide more detailed comments to the paper but will wait to see whether the journal agrees that a more comprehensive scope is needed which then would warrant a major revision. If the journal would like to accept the paper with minor revisions I could add some specific details in the next round.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
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Yes

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I am able to assess the statistics

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