Reviewer’s report

Title: Systematic review searches must be systematic, comprehensive, and transparent: A critique of Perman et al

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Reviewer: Edoardo Aromataris

Reviewer's report:

The authors provide a critical response to a systematic review published in this journal re School based vaccination problems by Perman et al. The authors highlight deficits in the conduct of the review - predominantly regarding the search strategy employed - that cast doubt on its comprehensiveness and trustworthiness of its conclusions. Overall the authors present a manuscript that is clear and succinct and that raises worthwhile points to consider re the conduct of a 'systematic review' in general.

Minor points to consider:

The critique provided focuses on deficits in searching, missed studies, and therefore potentially invalid/incomplete conclusions. I think the title should better reflect this and focus on 'study or data identification'. There are other methods required in rigorous systematic reviews that aren't touched on here.

Determining whether a review is in fact a 'systematic review' or not requires an almost 'relative' stance. If the entitlement to use the term 'systematic review' is referred to the methodologies and methods espoused by Cochrane, JBI or Campbell Collaboration for example, then the narrative synthesis presented by Perman, is, as the authors suggest, some distance from the mark. It would no doubt appear to be a risk of bias if appraised using available tools. This needs to be considered in light of the broader field however. Many emerging methodologies of 'systematic review', particularly of qualitative synthesis rely on methods that deviate from those of the 'traditional' systematic review. Some, for example meta-ethnographic synthesis, will legitimately search to saturation and do not claim to identify 'all' the available literature. In short, there are different forms of 'reviews' that all appear under the umbrella of 'systematic'. It would be ideal for the authors to 'identify' their benchmark or stance re 'rigour' in methodology.

Pg 5, 118. I'm unclear why the authors suggest the search used failed to find non-UK European articles? The majority of articles were from the US - 60% (as you would expect from a MEDLINE search). Should this read non-US/European articles?
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