Reviewer’s report

Title: STRICTA: is it time to do more?

Version: 1 Date: 9 April 2015

Reviewer: Mikel Aickin

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l.119: "examine" to replace "exam"
l.150: same comment
l.190: why "uptake" instead of "citation"
l.196: similarly, why "used" when you are only counting citations?
l.222: It is unclear at this point what "TIDieR" refers to.

It is unclear why citations of STRICTA are of the same level of importance as actual uses of the guideline. The accompanying files suggest that citation counts might rather badly over-estimate actual use in studies.

In the analysis of STRICTA citations over time, it would have been more useful to know the fractions of all articles citing it relative to those for which it was appropriate.

l.345: "As yet there are no formal tools to assess the validity of the reporting guidelines." The authors strongly advocate strict adherence to STRICTA, implying an improvement in scientific quality and benefits to clinical practice. But if the reporting guidelines are themselves deficient, then it is far from obvious that this would be expected. For example, the purpose of an RCT is to produce generalizable knowledge that should influence clinical practice, but one virtually never sees any reporting suggesting that the patients were sampled in a way that would allow some assessment of the chance that the study is in fact generalizable. It is not unreasonable to question whether an excellently reported study that cannot be generalized to any identifiable patient population is of any actual clinical use. For another example, there is a very wide variety of concepts about how to analyze RCTs, including many strategies that appear to be without merit. Again, even an excellent discussion of a poor analysis strategy need not help clinicians.

The implication of the present article seems to be that this can be addressed by more emphasis on the process of guideline development. This in turn seems to follow in the tracks of the universal if naïve belief that the science in RCTs will improve if they were only reported better.