Reviewer's report

Title: STRICTA: is it time to do more?

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Reviewer: Mikel Aickin

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The main thrust of the publishing guidelines movement has been to improve the process of assessing articles for inclusion in systematic reviews. One measure of success is therefore to chronicle uses and adherence to the guidelines, which is the main topic of the current article. In addition to this, however, it gives consideration to the process by which STRICTA guidelines have been developed. The guidelines were themselves concerned with the reporting of processes used in the research, and now we are seeing research on the measurement of process in the development of process measures. It is not clear how much further we should go in this direction.

It is also not clear whether any of the reporting guidelines have had any substantive impact on the quality of medical science, beyond perhaps improving reports. We found, for example, that the level of data analysis in acupuncture research articles was very poor, and in some cases incompetent. Possibly they would have been rated as acceptable in reporting what they did, but reporting was not the problem. Well-reported mediocre research is still mediocre.

To the contrary, the authors believe and assert multiple times that modifying and endorsing guidelines will benefit medical research, and they press for an improved process for doing this.

It is, however, less than obvious that this has worked in the past or will work in the future.