Reviewer's report

Title: Can UK NHS Ethics Committees effectively monitor publication and outcome reporting bias?

Version: 2 Date: 25 March 2015

Reviewer: Elizabeth Wager

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study on publication bias and offers a new angle on the problem (and thus, a possible new solution). It is clearly reported and the methods are robust. Although the study was done in the UK, the results are similar to studies from other countries so I see no reason why the findings shouldn’t be generalizable and of interest to a wide audience.

Major comment

(1) As the authors point out clearly, this study involved a lot of work. Given previous resistance to suggestions that RECs should monitor publications, I feel the authors should discuss the feasibility (and funding) of this in a bit more detail. For example, might they consider a simpler system in which RECs require copies of publications but perhaps don’t invest so much time in checking for completeness or selective reporting? Could RECs refuse permission for new projects until previous studies had been published?

(2) While noting that the industry may suppress findings (which was undoubtedly true in the past), for balance, the authors should perhaps cite some other studies of recent research which found that industry-funded studies were actually MORE likely to be published than others (there have been several).

(3) Given that the study period included the time before requirements for trial registration (from ICMJE and US legislation) it’s possible that both publication rates and selective reporting have changed during that period. It would be interesting to see if there were any time trends.

Major limitation

(4) The study found that the mean time to publication was around 4 years, but they considered projects ending up to 3 years and 8 months before their literature search. It would therefore be interesting to see an analysis of publication over time, or an analysis excluding the more recent studies.

(5) This may show that the problem is partly one of slow publication rather than non-publication. The authors might also like to discuss why publications take so long (although I realise that this was not the focus of their research).

Minor points
(a) Abstract, line 58 – should ‘formally’ be ‘formerly’?

(b) line 121 – the term ‘professional journal’ doesn’t seem right – this term is usually applied to non-peer-reviewed publications and newspapers aimed at specific professions – I think the term ‘scholarly’ or ‘academic’ journal is better.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests