Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 2 April 2015

Reviewer: Kerry Dwan

Reviewer's report:

The question posed by the authors is well defined. The methods are appropriate but could do with some clarification. The data appears to be sound but based on a very small sample, it is a shame that more data was not available. The figures appear to be genuine. The manuscript does not appear to adhere to any reporting standards and could benefit from a PRISMA style flow diagram. The discussion is well balanced and limitations are stated. The title and abstract adequately convey what was found.

Please number your comments and divide them into

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Methods: what is meant by the final sentence in the first paragraph?
2. Literature search: Did you not attempt to contact lead investigators of the studies to determine publication status?
3. Outcome reporting bias: Did you take into account any revisions submitted to ethics, as often during the course of a study legitimate changes are made. If not, this should be noted as a limitation in the discussion.
4. Where any reasons given for discrepancies in the trial reports?
5. Did you consult trial registries at all to see if the details were the same as the ethics submission?
6. Results, Publication outcomes: 21 studies were presented as conference abstracts and only 11 of which were published: If discrepancies were based on the conference abstract alone then there are bound to be discrepancies i.e. missing outcomes due to limited space in an abstract. This should be noted as a limitation and perhaps clarify how many of the 10 conference abstracts alone had a discrepancy.
7. Odds ratios are given in the results and yet the data analysis section states that only descriptive statistics are used. This section needs adding to with information on analyses conducted.
8. Should you be looking at the median time to publication as data appears skewed.
9. Consistency of outcomes: 32 outcomes were missing – where these primary or secondary?
10. You mention the significance of one outcome, did you look at this for any other outcomes i.e. the newly added outcome?

11. Results, third paragraph, final sentence: subgroup analysis is mentioned for the first time which makes it appear that other items as well as outcomes were compared. This should be specified in the methods and more detail given in the results.

12. Was only one outcome upgraded/downgraded?

13. Results, final two sentences – this analysis is not in the methods.

14. Discussion, third paragraph: Details not given in analysis section.

15. Discussion, fourth paragraph: the first sentence implies again that other reporting discrepancies were identified, what were they?

16. I feel as though the study would benefit from contacting investigators to determine publication status so that more comparisons on discrepancies can be made as the sample is very small (n=28).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests