Reviewer's report

Title: Common issues raised during the quality assurance process of WHO guidelines: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 07 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Rebecca Morgan

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review "Common issues raised during the quality assurance process of WHO guidelines: a cross-sectional study." This manuscript examines the guideline approval process within WHO and summarizes the proportion of guidelines delayed and for what reasons.

Major comments:

This manuscript provides detailed information on reasons for conditional and non-approval of guideline proposals and documents. While an important issue, the manuscript is very specific to the WHO process and could provide more information to generalize these issues of explore whether or not they are common to other institutions producing guidelines. While the authors state that this is the first manuscript to explore internal quality measures produced by a major organization, it would be beneficial to see what the literature has related to this topic and highlight instruments available to support the development of high-quality guidelines.

This study would benefit from the disaggregation of conditionally approved and non-approved documents. While the authors address the limitations of their approach, it would be beneficial to perform this additional analysis and report disaggregated results. Conditionally approved documents would be more likely to receive approval in a shorter time period since they did not require formal GRC review. Disaggregated results would highlight information to help guideline developers meet the standards of the GRC. Disaggregated results would also inform researchers developing guideline tools to facilitate the process.

How much did internal and external efforts influence trends of approval, such as training, update of the WHO handbook, inclusion of methodologists? Any exploration of trends by topic area?

How will the findings from this manuscript be implemented at WHO or how could they be used to improve the quality of guidelines at other organizations? I think additional details would be needed to provide actionable guidance.
Minor comments:

Consider including the Secretariat checklist or template as an appendix.

Page 10, line 7: I think the authors are trying to outline the domains in the GRADE evidence to decision framework. Is human rights a separate domain or is that considered under equity? If considered within equity, it could be removed from the sentence.

Could the paper be updated to include documents submitted in 2016 or through 1 March 2017? It would be helpful to see if there is any change in the trend or reasons why the documents were not approved.

Page 7, lines 41-44, consider stating the years in chronological order to display the trends.

Did the schedule of the GRC meetings influence the time interval until approval? For documents requiring full GRC review, this would be dependent on the regular meetings versus documents that could be reviewed with the Secretariat.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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