Author’s response to reviews

Title: Subjective judgements - no more, no less? A response to Malterud, Bjelland and Elvbakken

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Version: 1 Date: 17 Aug 2018

Author’s response to reviews:

Please note that this is the third revised version I am submitting, despite having revised in accordance with all comments received in the previous rounds.

I have not received any comments about not complying with reviewers' comments.

Note also that this is a rebuttal paper (originally meant as a Letter to the Editor, but not accepted as such since this format was/is not available in BMC journals) to a paper published 2 1/2 years ago by Malterud et al. I submitted my Letter to the Editor soon after that paper was published.

RESPONSE TO PEER REVIEW COMMENTS:

Reviewer 1 seems to suggest that the manuscript be published as is - I have no objection!

Reviewer 2 has a slightly more critical position, but presents his/her critique in a way that indicates that none of the objections are major, and that I "may want" to make suggested changes.

1. "The author may wish to strengthen the central argument that the methodological approach in the original paper is not sufficiently reported as it is likely to be of great interest and importance to the international scientific community. Some readers may find this argument arbitrary."

I don't think there is much to add - I basically provide the full methodological description as presented by Malterud et al, which I believe speaks for itself.

NO CHANGE.
2. "Likewise, referring to the peer-review may not be rigorous enough."

For the purpose of demonstrating that others too have struggled with grasping the Methods employed, the quote from the peer review report is probably as rigorous as it can get!

NO CHANGE.

3. "Instead, the author may wish to base their argument on the appropriate guidelines or checklist for reporting a given type of research and unpick the possible methodological limitations of the original paper one by one."

I could have done so, perhaps, but I don't think it is necessary or that it would add much. In this case referring to norms for Scientific Reporting seems unneeded to demonstrate the methodological problems.

NO CHANGE.

4. "The author may wish to leave aside the argument that demonstrating uncertainty may be useful in itself without mentioning it, or elaborate on it in more detail."

I could - it's not the key issue. However, I think it's an important point to make, and I think - in line with reviewer 1 - that I "make a good point" in the text as it stands.

NO CHANGE.

6. I feel that it is quite clear in the current text that my main critical argument is "that the methodological approach in the original paper is not sufficiently reported" - this is reflected in the title, the abstract, and the main substantial argument made in the text and in the concluding sentence.

NO CHANGE.

7. "I agree with reviewer 2 that my text has a certain personal flavour to, but I think that is OK since it is a rebuttal to a critique directed at me and my co-workers. I have, however, decided to delete my critique of Malterud et al for their lack of reflectivity, as this may be perceived as a way of counter attacking - which is not one of my objectives.

DELETED A PARAGRAPH.
8. Reviewer 2’s final point about my role in the production of the systematic reviews is already accounted for under "Competing interests" in the submitted manuscript: "I hold a leadership position at the Knowledge Centre for the Health Services (now part of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health) and I am co-author of one of the reports that Malterud et al assessed."

NO CHANGE.