Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 02 Aug 2018

Reviewer: Pavel Ovseiko

Reviewer's report:

Please feel free to pass my comments on to Author. I just wasn't sure whether they are supposed to be for Editor only or for Author as well.

This Letter to the Editor has a great potential to spark a lively ant timely debate about the strengths and limitations of systematic reviews and alternative approaches to synthesising evidence for policy makers. However, it falls short of realising its full potential and its polemical style may not fully adhere to the editorial standards of this journal. The following points may help the author to improve their letter.

At times, the style is too personal and some readers may find it too polemical. With hindsight, the author may appreciate an opportunity to revise their letter to make it less personal and instead concentrate on the points that would be of interest to the international scientific community. In revising their letter, the author may find these rules for writing a reply paper useful: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1004536

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. Likewise, referring to the peer-review may not be rigorous enough. Instead, the author may wish to base their argument on the appropriate guidelines or check-list for reporting a given type of research and unpick the possible methodological limitations of the original paper one by one.

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.

Finally, in line with the critique of a lack of reflexivity, it would be only appropriate for the author to declare their own preconceptions, motives and background. For example, it is unclear whether the author made any intellectual contribution to the 14 systematic reviews as a co-author, had any involvement in the research process in their administrative role, or benefited financially. If the author is not a co-author of at least one of the 14 systematic reviews discussed in the original article, then Commentary, rather than Letter to the Editor, may be a more appropriate format: https://health-policy-systems.biomedcentral.com/submission-guidelines/preparing-your-manuscript/commentary
Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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