Reviewer’s report

Title: Qualitative Evidence Synthesis (QES) for guidelines: Paper 1 Using Qualitative Evidence Synthesis to Inform Guideline Scope and Develop Qualitative Findings Statements.

Version: 0 Date: 08 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Janet Harris

Reviewer's report:

Overall, I enjoyed reading this paper. The methods for developing the series are clearly explained and the aim for this particular paper - to inform the scope and develop Summary of Findings statements. Under Search Methods, it would be helpful to explain more clearly the order of the searches. For example, in some cases a scoping review for the overall guideline may have been conducted before the qualitative search, flagging up possible concepts and terms that need to be included in the a priori scoping search for the QES. You noted this, but it needs to be more explicit that the QES strategy is informed by earlier searches as well as informing the overall guidelines search. This could be done for example with a statement saying that a qualitative search is conducted alongside (or after) the overall search for the guideline to inform the scope. (If this hasn't always been the case, then a sentence is needed saying that in some guidelines the a priori qualitative search was skipped.) There is then a second round of searching for topic-specific issues that could be informed by QES later in the guideline development process.

A couple of other small points:

Page 13 Contradictory review findings: The example illustrating inclusion of positive and negative findings in one statement is helpful; would it be possible to also provide an example where a decision was made to produce two separate statements? The reasoning behind the decision needs a bit more explanation. When and why would the decision be made to produce two rather than merging them?

Page 13 under Demonstrating rigor: 'Reasons for downgrading' - does this refer to reasons for downgrading the strength of evidence after using CERQual? A sentence is needed explaining what is done with the CERQual ratings.

The first paragraph of the Discussion section could be moved to become the first paragraph of the Conclusions. I suggest this because the rest of the Discussion section provides a useful summary of the ways in which QES changed the direction of the respective guidelines, demonstrating the utility of the syntheses. Following this with the statement that representatives on a guidelines development group cannot substitute for QES seems a more logical order to me.
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