Reviewer’s report

Title: Evaluation of the Cochrane Consumers and Communication Group’s systematic review priority setting project

Version: 0 Date: 26 May 2020

Reviewer: Sue Kinn

Reviewer's report:

This paper is well written, but as it stands it does not make the most of the work described and is rather thin for publication. It is a description of what was found, but does not draw out the main lessons and how they may be applied to improve future work. The work largely reports an evaluation process that was conducted some time ago, and hints at the fact that there has been enough time to measure outcomes, but this is not drawn out in the report.

The introduction highlights two major themes - about the lack of evaluation of prioritisation exercises, and the way that the Cochrane process engages with people. The final paragraph is quite weak and does not give the reader enough information about why the work was done and the potential impact it could have.

The data included an online survey with 151 responses - this is not put in context about how many people were invited to participate, how it relates to other similar work and whether this was the expected size of the response. Similarly there were only 28 people involved in the meetings, so very difficult to assess whether this is likely to be sufficient to provide robust results or not. Very little detail is provided about how the data were analysed, apart from being entered into a spreadsheet, or the range of responses received and levels of agreement/disagreement. It is convenient to use staff reflections, but it would strengthen the results to have more detail about participants reflections some time after the events described. The limitations section needs to be strengthened.

The conclusions are too strong for the data collected and would be more useful if, as above, lessons about what might be good to include in future similar evaluations, could be included and discussed. I think this would give genuinely new thinking to this area of work.

I was concerned about a statement saying reviews to be prioritised included those whose authors were open to participation of patients/consumers - are there still review authors for whom this is an issue?

No information was provided about why one of the reviews was rejected. It is important to unpick the reasoning, if this was one that was prioritised by the consumer group, and whether it was anything to do with the engagement process.

I would like to see something more explicit about what might be a good outcome from prioritisation processes and from this work and the reflections of the staff, consumers, research
team, what this means to improve future evaluations of this type, and what people embarking on prioritisation processes should include at the design stage to help later evaluations. There is mention of the collateral benefits - so more needs to be made of these in the context of this work.

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