Reviewer's report

Title: Using a systematic review in clinical decision making: a pilot parallel, randomized controlled trial

Version: 1
Date: 18 June 2015

Reviewer: Shannon Scott

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. This manuscript is thoughtfully developed to describe a pilot study whose purpose is to test methods and procedures prior to the full scale trial. The focus of the trial was to assess two shortened systematic review format to enhance their use in clinical decision making. The objectives of the pilot were to determine the feasibility of assessing participants’ answers and recruiting participants in a timely manner.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

This study took place in an online environment and focused on recruiting physicians (family medicine or general internal medicine). It is well documented in the literature, the challenges of recruiting physicians for research studies and this study was not different. Unfortunately only 56 physicians completed the pilot study (in 2 months) for an overall response rate of 4.3%. The Scott’s Medical Directory was the repository used to identify potential participants. The authors clearly delineated the challenges using this approach, including the large number of undeliverable invitations (approx. 25%). These numbers bring to the surface the obvious questions of "is this the most appropriate process to obtain potential participants for the full scale trial?" and "is online the ideal venue for future work with this population?" - the authors do a fair job reflecting on these poignant questions, yet I would encourage a robust reflection on these points in the discussion. Given the small sample size and small proportion of respondents, I would encourage the authors to include details as to whether their sample is at all representative of the family medicine and general internal medicine population listed in the Scott's directory. This would be particularly important moving forward as the question that nags at a reader is "are these participants typical family medicine/general internal medicine MDs." This would be important to identify this now as then changes can be made to the recruiting process for the full scale trial (if this sample is not representative of the population).

The study interface challenges (eg. Clinical scenario not appearing on the webpage with question 3) were well described and the changes made to enhance usability in the future. On page 13, first paragraph, there is a missing sentence, "Participants took an...."

The authors did a thorough job of outlining study goals and did an excellent job of delineating how each goal was met (e.g. participants recruited, kappa, and completion rates.). The author team outlined all of the limitations to this study,
however as previously mentioned, I would encourage more elaboration of these limitations. The appendices were completed and enhanced the manuscript.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests below.