Author's response to reviews

Title: Time to rethink the systematic review catechism? Moving from "what works" to "what happens"

Authors:

Mark P Petticrew (mark.petticrew@lshtm.ac.uk)

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors and referees

Many thanks for these comments and suggestions for improvement. My responses/changes are listed below.

Referee 1

1. I think the author has adequately addressed all the comments made by myself and other reviewers. I have a few very simple comments from a rapid read through of the revised text which I hope the author will find helpful but I would recommend publication of this paper in revised form.

2. There are one or two typos or clumsy phrasing in the new text – for example repeat of simpler and simple in first line of second highlighted paragraph on page 10. Worth another read through perhaps?

   Thanks – I have read through again and changed or deleted wording in a few places to clarify the text.

3. I think the revised title is more interesting and a better pointer to the content than the original reference to ‘challenges’

4. I wonder if the reference to Bayesian perspective in the abstract without explanation would be understandable to all readers. It would be helpful to added the phrase from page 10: “a Bayesian perspective that would aim to assemble evidence - of different types, if necessary – in order to inform decisions”

   Yes, this is probably not understandable on its own – I have added this text.

5. To address my second point about the interrelated nature of the challenges if the word ‘inter-related’ was inserted before ‘challenges’ on the second to last line on page 1 of main text

   I agree – now added.

6. The additional text in the first challenge around focused question works well but the author might consider changing the way this challenge is labeled – as he says he isn’t arguing that the question should not be focused but rather than the focus should shift from a narrowly focused ‘what works’ question to a broader focused what happens question

   Yes, this should have been changed, as the labelling is a hang-over from the previous version - I have changed this as suggested.

7. Ref page 8: I described the handmaiden role for qualitative research in a plenary presentation to the Cochrane Collaboration Colloquia 2007 I think – maybe could be referenced?

   Missing reference has now been added.

8. I don’t agree with the author that all current reviews of complex interventions
actually do consider ‘what has happened’ either explicitly or implicitly. It is letting many reviewers ‘off the challenge hook ‘to say this Some do but not all – maybe qualify?

This is true –very few do consider “what has happened”. Thanks- I have changed this wording.

**Referee 2**

There are two minor points the author may wish to consider for the final version:

1. Ref 10 (RAMESES publication standards) - the protocol rather than the final standards have been cited. This is the final publication: WONG, G., GREENHALGH, T., WESTHORP, G., BUCKINGHAM, J. & PAWSON, R. 2013. RAMESES publication standards: realist syntheses. BMC Med, 11, 21.

   *Thanks – now amended.*

2. The abstract would benefit from mentioning the methodological research agenda (as summarised in the conclusion).

   *Thanks – now added to the abstract.*

Mark Petticrew
5.3.15