Reviewer's report

Title: Measures of upper limb function for people with neck pain: A systematic review of measurement and practical properties (Protocol)

Version: Date: 26 January 2015

Reviewer: Lex Bouter

Reviewer's report:

This is a clear and adequately detailed protocol of a timely systematic review of studies of measurement properties of available measures of upper limb function for neck pain patients.

Major Compulsory Revisions
None.

Minor Essential Revisions
# Background – Here and elsewhere the term upper limb disorder is used. But the focus of the review is on measures for upper limb (dys)functioning or (dis)ability among patients with neck pain. In my view the cause of the neck pain and/or the cause of the upper limb problem the instrument tries to assess is irrelevant. The term disorder suggests an etiological and pathophysiological focus that is not at issue. Please remove the suggestion that the review is looking for measures that are applicable to patients with a specific pathological entity. The broad domain for which the measures are evaluated seems to be (specific or aspecific) neck pain.

# Background – The authors can maybe explain what types of measures they are expecting to find and whether all types are eligible for the systematic review (patient reported, observation, physical examination, ROM, focus on ADL etc.).

# Methods – It is stated that also unpublished studies will be included, but no explanation is given how this will be done and why the authors decided to attempt this.

# Methods – Why are only articles written in English eligible? A possible justification could be that the focus is on measures that are available in English and that the authors expect that articles on their measurement properties will also be in English.

# Methods – Only the MEDLINE search is provided. Please also specify the adaptations of the search strategy for the other databases. This could be made available in an appendix of the protocol.

# Methods – Please consider adding the standardized data extraction form as an appendix to the protocol.

# Tables – Please add references to Table 1 an 2 explaining their source.
Discretionary Revisions

# Throughout the protocol the authors stress that their focus is on the selection of measures that can be used in clinical practice. That is a goal different from and clearly more difficult than selecting instruments that can be used in clinical research. For use in clinical research instruments should be suitable to detect differences in severity (or changes in severity) of upper limb dysfunction between groups, while the instrument should be able to do this for individual patients for use in clinical practice. This has profound implications for judging the scores of the measurement properties found in the literature. I would urge to explain this in the protocol and to be specific on when the measurement properties from the COSMIN list are good enough to recommend use of an instrument in clinical practice.

# Methods – Why not also perform an EMBASE search of the literature? The overlap with a MEDLINE search is typically substantial, but certainly not perfect.

Minor issues not for publication

# Methods – In the section on the search strategy: neck pain population # neck pain patients

# Methods – The last sentence in the section on Phase one (Clearly defined....) seems to belong to the section on Phase 2.

# References – A few typos in reference 22: Boutera ELM # Bouter LM and de Veta HCW # de Vet HCW.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I’m part of the COSMIN steering group, which is the methodology which will be used for the proposed systematic review. And Caroline Terwee is a colleague working in the same department. I did not know, but she advised the authors on their protocol and she was thanked for that in an acknowledgement.

I do not believe that these facts form a conflict of interest that render me unsuitable as a reviewer of the protocol at issue, but I thought you should know about it.