Reviewer’s report

Title: What value is the CINAHL database when searching for systematic reviews of qualitative studies?

Version: 1 Date: 12 January 2015

Reviewer: Margaret Sampson

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this is a useful paper. I think the use of CINAHL has dropped off since it became available only through EbscoHost, due to the nuisance factor. Fresh evidence on its role and usefulness is therefore welcome.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Reporting:

1. The authors should review the PRISMA check list for omitted elements, and revise the manuscript for more complete reporting. Element that have not been reported include a flow diagram, search strategy used for DARE, and search dates.

Discretionary Revisions

Potential additional investigations: I realize it is very annoying to have peer reviewers who are good idea fairies, but I wondered about two things that might help shed light on the contribution of this database.

2. Regarding the utility for areas outside of nursing; if you have the included CINAHL references as a set, it might be interesting to see what proportion were from the journals in the nursing journal subset (recognizing that nursing research can be relevant to reviews originating from other fields).

3. Regarding the retrievability of the qualitative studies in CINAHL, which you could not test; several subject headings relevant to qualitative designs are mentioned in the introduction. It might be interesting to see how many of the included studies could be retrieved by using them or the term "qualitat*" in any field. I don't know if any of the CINAHL qualitative filters listed at ISSG search filter resource use the EBSCOhost interface, but testing them against the included set might also be useful – but maybe that is another paper.

Minor revisions:

4. p. 3 "Nevertheless, it is considered that some databases are more useful than others for specific types of review and CINAHL is" - s needed on "review"

5. Same paragraph – "CINAHL is generally thought to be" – can you support this with citations?

6. Same paragraph – Clarify if these subject headings are also available as
MeSH, as there is a good deal of overlap between CINAHL and MeSH terms.

7. On page 5, I think there was a third goal, to assess what percent of CINAHL included studies were retrieved from CINHAL, although poor reporting prevented you from exploring that. I would still encourage you to state it as a goal, if it was (here is the value of a prospectively registered systematic review protocol).

8. Figure 3. Please make this a 2D graph, in the same style as the other figures. 3D makes the graph more difficult to read, so isn't really suitable for a research article.

**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 declare that I have no competing interests