Author’s response to reviews

Title: Use of ward closure to control outbreaks among hospitalized patients in acute care settings: A systematic review

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Version: 2
Date: 14 September 2015

Author’s response to reviews: see over
Re: Resubmission of MS: 1542940562176162 - Use of ward closure to control outbreaks among hospitalized patients in acute care settings: A systematic review

Dear Drs. Moher, Shekelle, and Stewart:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a revised version of our manuscript “Use of ward closure to control outbreaks among hospitalized patients in acute care settings: A systematic review”. We have carefully revised the manuscript, taking into consideration the referee’s suggested revisions. Below, we listed each revision request in bold, followed by our response, and made the corresponding changes to the manuscript in the ‘tracked changes’ format.

1. **The manuscript “Use of ward closure to control outbreaks among hospitalized patients in acute care settings: A systematic review” by Wong et al. analyses the evidence for the measure “ward closure” in an outbreak setting. Regrettably the authors do not debate the pathogens’ transmissibility which is the basis for all measures in infection prevention and control. E.g., foodborne transmission has to be faced different to airborne transmission. The different transmission modes should be considered rather than just categorizing studies in accordance to the affected body site (Tables 1-5).**

We thank the reviewer for pointing out this which is an oversight on our part for assuming that the readership would be familiar with the routes of transmission of the pathogens examined in our review. We made two revisions to address this:

   (i) We reviewed all the studies again and the pathogens associated with these outbreaks with respect to the modes of transmission. Within the “Results” section on page 11, we revised the paragraph on how the studies were organized to include a sentence indicating how the stated categorization of the studies by organ system and by causative microorganism may be aligned with categorization by the mode(s) of transmission. We also included a sentence stating the modes of transmission...
relevant to our study, and cited an appropriate reference on the modes of transmission of different microbes within healthcare settings.

(ii) Within the results section for each category of the studies (as per our original organization of the studies by the organ system(s) affected), we included a sentence stating the mode of transmission of the pathogens in the studies we reviewed. We cited the same reference for these statements. We have also added this information to the tables (in brackets) for additional clarity for the readership.

2. Ward closure as “the last option" of solving potentially severe problems has to debated more differentially and not recommended as a measure that "should not be actively encouraged or enacted as a formal policy, particularly considering the challenges that it can produce in the context of limited bed capacity" as concluded by the authors in the last paragraph of the results section.

We would like to thank the reviewer for raising this point and the suggestion to provide a more differential debate on the subject. We are in agreement with the reviewer regarding this recommendation, and have removed it from our manuscript. We have addressed the “differential debate” comment in the Discussion as stated below.

3. This paper may have identified a high number of outbreak descriptions but it should focus more on practical relevance and consider infection control expertise.

We agree with the reviewer that our review should include more discussion on the practical relevance of our findings. Thus within the “Discussion” on page 24, we included a measured debate of the advantages and disadvantages of using ward closure as an outbreak control method. We think that these latter additions strengthen the manuscript and its interpretation for a general readership. We did however retain our finding about the difficulty of making a firm conclusion since one of our primary objectives was to compare the use of ward closure versus no ward closure in the responses to hospital related outbreaks. This objective was set out in the standard PICOT format and we wish to remain true to the conclusions from the data found (ie no studies were found where ward closure was not used) within our extensive review and to retain the fundamental principles of the systematic review approach which we believe is important for the journal readership.

In addition to the editorial requests, we removed the protocol and search strategies from the manuscript file and included them as additional files.

(end of comments)

Thank you once again for providing us with the opportunity to resubmit our manuscript, and we look forward to a response at your earliest convenience.

Kind regards,

Holly Wong (on behalf of our team)