Author's response to reviews

Title: Structural barriers in access to medical marijuana in the U.S.: A systematic review protocol

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G.J. Melendez-Torres
Editorial Office
Systematic Reviews

Dear Dr. Melendez-Torres

Re: SYSR-D-16-00274R2: A protocol for the systematic review of structural barriers to accessing medical marijuana in the U.S.

Thank you for sending us your comments and those of your reviewers. We have carefully reviewed the manuscript taking account of these comments. Below is a step-by-step statement of how the comments were addressed. The manuscript has also been thoroughly reviewed to grammar by a native English speaker.

We thank you for your kind consideration and look forward to your decision soon.

Best wishes,

Ibitola Asaolu,
For, and on behalf of the authors.
RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS’ COMMENTS

Comment #1: I disagree that a scoping review does not synthesise studies, though it is certainly unlikely, for example, to use a forest plot or even meta-analyse. The act of categorising and representing structural barriers to marijuana use is itself an act of synthesis. How will you categorise and represent these different barriers, or accomplish your objective, to 'generate scientific evidence to fill the current gap in the literature'? I would strongly suggest that you revisit your synthesis section in light of a specific method (as suggested prior, framework synthesis would be a good fit) to enable you to classify and discuss structural barriers to marijuana use.

Response: Thank you for the suggestion. We have revised our data synthesis to include a clearer synthesis discussion. Guided by the review’s objectives and outcome measures assessed, we will synthesize qualitative data using the framework method of evidence synthesis for the systematic review of qualitative evidence.

Comment # 2: Please cite or provide a specific tool for the appraisal of qualitative studies.

Response: We thank the reviewers for this comment. Qualitative studies will be appraised, using the checklist for appraisal of qualitative research developed by the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), Oxford, United Kingdom (CASP, 2017). CASP tool for assessing the methodological strength of qualitative studies consists of ten questions that are designed to evaluate conceptual strength, its relevance, and methodological rigor (including method of sample selection, data collection, data analyses, and statement of findings) (Kuper, Lingard, & Levinson, 2008), as well as its overall contribution to existing knowledge or understanding (CASP, 2017).

Comment # 3: I am not sure that your discussion of reporting biases is accurate. Reporting bias refers to biases in the results that are reported WITHIN studies, while publication bias refers to bias in terms of which studies are even published. Please revisit your discussion of reporting biases in light of this.

Response: We agree with the reviewer’s observation and have revised the manuscript accordingly. Publication bias, a form of reporting bias, arises when the dissemination of research findings is influenced by the nature and direction of results (Higgins and Green, 2011). To address publication bias in the review, we will conduct an exhaustive search of major electronic databases in order to identify all potentially eligible studies. We will hand-search reference list of identified articles, and contact investigators and organizations whose research or programs relate to access to medical marijuana in order to obtain information on completed and ongoing trials.

Comment # 4: --Ovid is not a database, but a platform. Are you planning on searching MEDLINE? If so, what is the added value of searching PubMed? I am still not sure that your
omission of truncations and wildcards is appropriate as these will make your search more sensitive.

Response: We thank the reviewer for this comment. Reference to Ovid has been deleted since we will conduct MEDLINE search. We had thought that truncation and wild card search may not be necessary since the focus of the review is on structural barriers to accessing medical marijuana in the U.S. and not global. However, we agree with the reviewer and will conduct truncation and wild card search as appropriate in order to optimize our search strategy.