Author's response to reviews

Title: The effects of community pharmacy public health interventions on population health and health inequalities: umbrella review protocol

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1. How will they assess for and what will they do about overlap in primary studies between reviews?

Many thanks for the reviewer for raising this point, and we acknowledge that this is an important aspect to consider when undertaking a review of reviews. This is acknowledged in an excellent review published by Pollock and colleagues in Systematic Reviews (DOI 10.1186/s13643-016-0367-5). In view of this, when assessing systematic reviews we will also check the primary studies for overlap. If we find overlap with existing reviews, our strategy for dealing with issue will be to use synthesis that: (1) provide the most complete description, (2) is the most recent, (3) contains the most evidence and (4) the method that is the most vigorous. In view of our knowledge of the research subject, we feel this approach is more robust than just including all evidence (and thus potentially including overlapping studies).

2. How will they assess whether a review is out of date and should be excluded?

As using community pharmacy as a platform for delivering public health services is a relatively new area of research we do not anticipate this will be an issue. Many of the empirical research
studies were, at the earliest, published in the mid-nineties – with systematic reviews published after this. Whilst we will report the date of publication we won’t exclude reviews on the basis that they are out of date.

3. How will they deal with differences between reviews in the assessments of risk of bias of the original studies?

4. How will they deal with differences in assessments of the strength of evidence across reviews, including that some reviews may not do any strength of the evidence assessment?

Again, many thanks to the reviewer for raising these important points, as they are important to consider when undertaking a review of reviews. As points 3 and 4 are similar, we will address them as one. As discussed in the overview by Pollock and colleagues, we will report the quality assessments and risk of bias assessments of the original studies. In addition, AMSTAR has questions specifically related to quality of evidence and whether the original reviews assessed bias.