Reviewer’s report

Title: Exosomal microRNAs as potential circulating biomarkers in gastrointestinal tract cancers: A systematic review protocol

Version: 0 Date: 08 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Claire Vale

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

I thought that the protocol was generally well written and outlines an interesting systematic review of studies that have investigated the micro RNA profiles of serum exosomes in GI cancers.

Minor comments:

* The authors state that the review will be reported in line with PRISMA-P, however this guideline refers to the protocol only and not the completed review. The authors should state the correct reporting guidelines for their review.

* There are some citations that appear in the body of the text that are not included in the reference list. For example, in the risk of bias assessment section (page 5 line 14) citations are mentioned by Hoy et al and Werfali et al. These (and any others) should be included in the reference list

* I am not certain that the Discussion section (Page 6 lines 5-18) is necessary for a protocol or that it adds to the content

Major comments:

* I feel that the strategy for data synthesis is confused and needs some further thought. For example, page 5 line 28-29 states that outcomes will be reported as descriptive statistics without conducting meta-analysis. However, the subsequent paragraphs in that sub-section seem to describe the plans for meta-analysis. I think the authors need to be clearer about their plans for data synthesis. If they believe that meta-analysis will not be possible, or will not be informative, then I would rather see details of a planned narrative synthesis of the results.
However, if there are to be formal meta-analyses, perhaps the authors should state that meta-analysis is planned providing sufficient data are available. Also, as the authors expect there to be considerable heterogeneity, I would rather see plans to investigate some stated hypotheses of the possible causes of heterogeneity stated in advance. I think this would be preferable to what is stated at present, which is for statistical heterogeneity to be assessed and then unspecified, post hoc analyses conducted to try to identify the sources of that heterogeneity.

* I may have missed it but PRISMA-P asks for details of planned assessment of the strength of the body of evidence (e.g. using GRADE) but that appears to be missing from the protocol. The authors should consider adding this or stating why it is not being proposed here.

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