Author’s response to reviews

Title: Prevalence and pattern of co-occurring musculoskeletal pain and its association with back-related disability among people with persistent low back pain: protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis

Authors:
Cecilie K. Overaas (ckoveraas@health.sdu.dk)
Melker Johansson (msjohansson@health.sdu.dk)
Tarcisio de Campos (tarcisio.decamos@mq.edu.au)
Manuela Ferreira (manuela.ferreira@sydney.edu.au)
Bard Natvig (bard.natvig@medisin.uio.no)
Paul Jarle Mork (paul.mork@ntnu.no)
Jan Hartvigsen (jhartvigsen@health.sdu.dk)

Version: 1 Date: 24 Nov 2017

Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor and reviewers.

Thank you for your feedback. We have now considered the points you suggested and corrections are highlighted with yellow and with “tracked changes” in the text and commented below:

Reviewer #1:

The search strategy appears valid (perhaps you could publish this string in it's own right, for other authors to use in similar works?) This will be done in the final article of this systematic review.

Three small suggestions/questions:

1. p9, line 9 - remove comma before and

Changed in the text.
2. p9, line17 - "10% of THE total YLDs", add the

Changed in the text.

3. Will you provide a GRADE assessment of the evidence as well as the risk of bias assessments? I wasn't quite clear on this part of the protocol or if this is typically done for such reviews (although I can't see why not). Normally both are presented... perhaps this could be clarified, please?

Our approach is consistent with GRADE, but we will not make a separate GRADE assessment in this review as it is not typically done for prevalence studies.

Has this work been offered to the Cochrane Collaboration? I'm sure they would be interested in work of this calibre... No

Reviewer #3:

The authors acknowledge the complexity of the proposed search strategy and the protocol includes some relevant details as to how this challenge will be addressed. One concern I would raise is that the protocol states that authors will be contacted to resolve uncertainty over inclusion/missing data. This could potentially be a major and time consuming task in an otherwise already complex search.

This is a good point, but we still intent to remain open in case we have relevant questions regarding individual studies.

Specific comments are as follows:

P2:L39: Suggest stating any additional techniques for retrieval or remove this line from abstract

Removed from the abstract

P2:L46 Suggest replacing solve with resolve

Changed in the text

P3:L10: Change to "Results of this proposed review (instead of study) Changed in the text

P7:L39: Although it is clear why RCTs will not be included in the review please state the reason in the protocol

That is a good point. We have added the following sentence on this in the discussion;
We choose not to include randomised controlled trials, because it is difficult to generalise their baseline findings to our target populations.

P7:L51: Suggest rewording sentence as it is unclear. e.g, search strategy will combine search term groups that represent the following...

Changed in the text to the following: We will combine search term groups covering the following domains: back pain,…and so on.

P8:L51: At the protocol stage a decision should have already been made on this. It is unclear why there are two options listed for citation management.

Changed in the text. We have now decided to use Endnote only.

P10:L29: The authors state that studies with high risk of bias will not included in the final synthesis. This is potentially a source of bias if the decisions on this are not made very clear in the review i.e, will need to report clear reasons for assessing a study as being of high RoB. Further, it may be relevant to include all evidence in the analysis and separately assess high RoB studies in a sub-group analysis.

We have considered this and changed it to the following; All studies will be included in the evidence synthesis, but those with low risk of bias will be considered separately.

P11:L9: Again, please state which option will be used in the protocol. Changed in the text to only use STATA.