Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0  Date: 19 Oct 2017

Reviewer: Sean O'Connor

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting review topic and a well written and concise protocol manuscript. PRISMA-P recommendations have been followed and the protocol provides a strong rationale for the conduct of the planned review and a brief review of the background evidence. It also addresses an area of practice in which there is limited evidence. Overall, the methods and planned analysis appear to be appropriate with a justifiable modification to the Risk of Bias tool.

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.

Specific comments are as follows:

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

P2:L46 Suggest replacing solve with resolve

P3:L10: Change to "Results of this proposed review (instead of study)

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

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

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.

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.

P11:L9: Again, please state which option will be used in the protocol.

**Level of interest**
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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