Author’s response to reviews

Title: Cholera diagnosis in human stool and detection in water: protocol for a systematic review of available technologies

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Author’s response to reviews:
Re: SYSR-D-17-00068

Dear Systematic Reviews Editorial Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit the manuscript “Cholera diagnosis in human stool and detection in water: protocol for a systematic review of available technologies”.

We wish to thank the two reviewers for the time devoted to this manuscript and their insightful and pragmatic comments. Please see replies agreed by the author team in a table below. Replies have additionally been uploaded as requested onto the online system.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.
Best wishes,

The Author Team

Reviewer 1:

1. This review once completed would be useful for clinicians practicing in endemic regions for cholera. I note some minor improvements to this protocol.

Reply: We appreciate the reviewer seeing the value of this work and offering constructive suggestions for strengthening the protocol.

2. Databases searched: Suggest to include SCOPUS

Reply: Please note Scopus is already included in the set of databases to be searched. Location: Page 9

3. Languages included: Though authors state there will be no language restrictions, in practice there will be language restrictions. So it will be good if they specify which languages are included

Reply: We have clarified how we will proceed when we retrieve studies in different languages and have noted ancillary limitations.

Location: Page 11
4. Types of studies included: Authors state they will include "retrospective" studies and case control studies. It is unclear how diagnostic tests can be evaluated by retrospective analysis.

Reply: We agree phrasing was ambiguous regarding this and have clarified. “Retrospective” in this case referred to studies re-analysing samples collected for other purposes (e.g. routine surveillance.)

Location: Page 10

5. Gold standard: what is the gold standard for diagnosis? In situations where this is not available for comparison how will you determine a positive case?

Reply: We have added relevant clarifications in the ‘Study selection’ section:

a) We will include all studies reporting on the performance of an index-test against a comparator. We acknowledge culture methods as the gold standard, however will include studies reporting against any comparator test and group, present and synthetize information by comparator test type.

b) Given the likely variability in studies – and potential low quality of some comparator tests - we already acknowledge in the ‘Data synthesis – meta-analysis’ section that we will only proceed to meta-analysis for those studies using the gold standard (i.e. culture) as the comparator.

Location: Page 10 and 13
Reviewer 2:

6. Congratulations on your effort to prepare the protocol. Diagnostic of cholera is an important topic.

Reply: We are pleased at the recognition of cholera diagnostics as an important area of study.

7. I found the scope of your review protocol was difficult to follow. Some of the information is repetitive or extensively explained.

Reply: We have now included a ‘Study design and scope’ section at the start of the Methods section and revised the ‘Study selection’ section to more clearly delineate the scope of the review.

We agree information in the protocol is extensively presented: however, we believe this is essential as we are targeting a multi-disciplinary audience including researchers, diagnostic manufacturers and product developers and health care professionals involved in cholera surveillance and management worldwide.

Location: Pages 7 and 10/11

8. I would suggest to be more consistent with your proposal and also to establish a setting (whether this is world wide, countries affected by the disease, a specific country/region).

Reply: We agree – please see clarification in the ‘Study design and scope’ and ‘Study selection’ section.

Location: Pages 7 and 10/11
9. Clearly state which methodology you will follow: PRISMA statement is in the appendix, but there is no mention in methods.

Reply: Thank you – we have added two clarifications:

a) Please see clarification on Page 9 regarding methodology followed.

b) Please see additional section ‘Reporting’ on page 14.

10. Please also consider to use the correct names of the electronic databases that you will use. EBSCO for example offers a compilation of library resources, it's unclear to me why you want to access PubMed using EBSCO instead of the direct access through the National Center for Biotechnology Information. WHO library is also a compilation of library resources, the Global Index Medicus (GIM) provides worldwide access to biomedical and public health literature.

Reply: We agree to report the names of the electronic databases as suggested.

Location: Abstract and Page 9.

11. I encourage you to resubmit the manuscript after carefully revising it, there are many areas that can be improved.

Reply: We have made revisions in response to reviews as detailed above. In weighing our response to reviewer suggestions we have been mindful of presenting the protocol with a detail suited to the diverse disciplinary backgrounds of the potential audiences for this review.