Reviewer’s report

Title: Maintaining relevance in HIV systematic reviews: an evaluation of Cochrane reviews

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Reviewer: Deborah Passey

Reviewer's report:

Dear Authors,

I have had the pleasure of reading your manuscript letter titled "Maintaining Relevance in HIV Systematic Reviews". I believe this letter is an important topic to address for the constantly evolving field of HIV research. I think there is a lot of value in this area of research and I am happy to see it being addressed. However, I have a few minor issues and questions.

1. I find it very interesting that the majority of protocols did not progress to full reviews (34/39). Did the five protocols progressing to full review get included in the number of published reviews (n=109)? If so, did these reviews need updating? Given that most protocols did not progress to full review due to outdated research questions or not reflecting current practices, would you recommend that more researchers publish protocols before progressing to the full systematic review? Does publishing a protocol before conducting a full review stop researchers from unnecessary work? What are the implications of this finding?

2. The letter recommends clearly defining the research question and to adapt tools to design conceptual frameworks, which I completely agree with. However, I am surprised there was no discussion of the PICO/PICOT criteria for research questions (population, intervention, control, outcome, time frame), or any other discussion about frameworks for researchers to follow when designing a systematic review. It seems from the results presented that researchers don't need to reinvent the wheel, but they need to use a consistent criteria for defining research questions and adapt existing evidence-based conceptual frameworks. Using an existing framework helps unify concepts and makes it easier to compare results across studies.

3. You provided us with the reasons why reviews were assessed as "not for updating", but what differentiated the reviews that needed updating? Did you see frameworks that were used across multiple studies? For example, did researchers use PICO or PRISMA in those reviews? What should happen to the existing reviews and protocols that are not for updating? How do we prevent researchers from using those as examples and possibly going down the
wrong path? Since this is a letter, I'd like to see a stronger call to action for researchers and scholars in this field.

4. I think Table 1 would be more useful and informative as a Flow Diagram (such as a modified PRISMA Flow Diagram) starting with the full number found for each type (n=109 reviews and n=39 protocols) and then using arrows and boxes to show how articles were classified, ending with the final number of reviews (n=14) and protocols (n=5) that could be updated. This visual would really highlight to readers the high amount of evolution in HIV research. Examples here: http://prisma-statement.org/prismastatement/flowdiagram.aspx

To close, I think this letter is an important contribution to the field and I applaud you for your efforts.

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