Reviewer’s report

Title: Patient prioritization tools and their effectiveness in non-emergency healthcare services: A systematic review protocol

Version: 0 Date: 10 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Ferrán Catalá-López

Reviewer’s report:

This paper describes a study protocol for a systematic review on patient prioritization tools and their effectiveness in healthcare services. Overall, this a well written paper in an important subject. The reporting of planned methods is transparent, but some aspects could be improved.

I was asked for an open peer review report and this includes all aspects of the design and reporting of the study protocol.

Comments:

p.2 Abstract. Background. Please, provide an explicit statement of the review objective with reference to participants.

p.2 Abstract. Methods. Lines 58-60 (including research question) should be deleted. Methods section should report how the study will be performed, including: data sources, study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions (prioritization tools); study appraisal and synthesis methods planned.

p.2 Abstract. Methods. Lines 60-61. The authors' state: "A systematic review of the literature will be carried out following PRISMA guidelines". In my opinion, the authors should rephrase the text in order to clarify they used/will use reporting guidance by PRISMA statement. To clarify, PRISMA is not intended to be prescriptive about how (protocols) systematic reviews and meta-analyses should be conducted/interpreted. Instead, PRISMA seeks to provide reporting guidance on important information to be included in reports of systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

p.2 Abstract. Methods. The authors' state: "Five electronic databases will be searched". Please, be more explicit (e.g. name of 5 electronic databases).

p.2 Abstract. Methods. The authors' state: "Two reviewers will screen, select and extract studies, which will be analyzed using narrative synthesis method". Please, be more explicit.

p.4 and 7. Background. The justification is clearly argued, but I think this section could/should be simplified. Please, be more explicit when describing the rational for this review in the context of what is already know (e.g. previous systematic reviews in references 9-11, 17).
p.7. Background. Objectives. Could you please provide a more explicit statement of the research question(s) the review will address with reference to participants and settings (eg. "across healthcare services" I think it is too vague), prioritization tools, outcomes, etc…

p.7 Methods. Please, if your systematic review protocol has been registered in a publicly accessible registry, include the name of the registry and registration number. For example: "The present protocol has been registered within the PROSPERO database (registration number: xxx) and is being reported in accordance with the reporting guidance the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocols (PRISMA-P) statement [with reference] (see PRISMA-P checklist in Additional file 1).

p.7 Methods. The authors' state: "A systematic review of the literature will be carried out following PRISMA guidelines". Please, delete/revise (see previous comments).

p.7. Methods. Search strategy. Please, include a new section "Information sources". Line 180. In my opinion, the research question should be placed before methods section.

Please, describe all the intended information sources (not only 5 electronic databases, also: contact with study authors, grey literature sources if any).

Draft of search strategy to be used is included in Appendix Table 1. Authors should clarify if this search is for MEDLINE/Ovid (or PubMed/MEDLINE), and report planned limits (e.g. publication status, language, years considered).

p.8 Methods. Line 200. Could you please clarify the time frame for literature search providing a rationale? Why "from January 2000 to September 2018"?

P.8-9 Methods. Eligibility criteria. Please, specify study characteristics (study design, setting, time frame) and report characteristics to be used as inclusion/exclusion criteria. For example, regarding study design, the authors seem to be interested in "peer-reviewed quantitative/qualitative/mixed methods empirical studies, literature reviews, and thesis" (lines 203-204). Please, be more explicit when you mention "empirical studies", "literature reviews, and thesis"? (e.g. randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, systematic reviews and meta-analysis, etc…?).

Page. 9. Study selection and data extraction. In my opinion, this section should be rewritten under a new epigraph "Screening and selection process". State the process that will be used for selecting studies (e.g. two independent reviewers, in duplicate?) through each phase of the review (e.g. screening, eligibility, and inclusion in review). For example: "Two reviewers will screen all articles identified from the search independently. First, titles and abstracts of articles returned from initial searches will be screened based on the eligibility criteria outlined above. Second, full texts will be examined in detail and screened for eligibility. Third, references of all considered articles will be hand-searched to identify any relevant report missed in the search strategy by two reviewers independently. Any disagreement between reviewers will be resolved by discussion to meet a consensus."
Page 9. Please, include "Data collection process" as new epigraph. Describe planned methods of extracting data from reports (e.g. piloting forms, done independently, in duplicate), any process for obtaining and confirming data from investigators. List and define all variables for which data will be sought (e.g. PICO items, study designs, prioritization tools with examples, effect measures, findings, etc...), and any pre-planned data assumptions and simplifications.

Page 8. Outcomes and prioritization. Please, define all outcomes for which data will sought, including rationale for prioritization for main and secondary outcomes. Authors could include a BOX/or Table with definitions and examples of outcomes.

Page 9. Quality assessment of studies (or Risk of bias in included studies). Please, include a new section describing anticipated methods for assessing risk of bias (or quality) of individual studies, including bibliographic references and whether this will be done at the outcome or study level; any categorization (e.g. high, moderate or low risk of bias) and state how this information will be used in data synthesis.

Page 9. Data synthesis (instead of "Data analysis"). I assume you anticipate quantitative synthesis is not appropriate for this review. Why? Could you please describe the type of summary planned (narrative review) in more detail.

Page 10. The authors' state: "we will use a tool to evaluate the quality of article by considering designs of the studies obtained by the review". Please my comments above. Could you please be more explicit? E.g. Cochrane risk of bias for randomized controlled trials? NOS for observational studies? AMSTAR-2 for systematic reviews/meta-analysis?

Page 10. The authors' state: "We will assess the strength of the body of evidence using Downs-Black tool, GRADE or others" Again, please, be more explicit and describe how the strength of the body of evidence will be assessed (e.g. providing definitions of high confidence, moderate confidence and low confidence)

Page 10. Discussion. Where: "This systematic review provides much needed"… should be (in future): "(…) will provide".

Page 10. Discussion. Please, discuss potential limitations at study (outcome) level, and at review level you anticipate.


Appendix. PRISMA-P checklist. Please, revise (considering all the above).

**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:

Needs some language corrections before being published

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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Were you mentored through this peer review?

No