Author’s response to reviews

Title: Pragmatic methods for reviewing exceptionally large bodies of evidence: Systematic mapping review and overview of systematic reviews using lung cancer survival as an exemplar

Authors:

Ruth Lewis (r.lewis@bangor.ac.uk)
Maggie Hendry (m.hendry@bangor.ac.uk)
Nafees Din (n.u.din@bangor.ac.uk)
Marian Stanciu (m.andrei.stanciu@gmail.com)
Sadia Nafees (s.nafees@bangor.ac.uk)
Annie Hendry (a.hendry@bangor.ac.uk)
Zhi Teoh (zteoh20@gmail.com)
Thomas Lloyd (tomtheslloyd101@gmail.com)
Rachel Parsonage (drparsonage@doctors.org.uk)
Richard Neal (R.D.Neal@leeds.ac.uk)
Gareth Collier (Gareth.M.Collier@wales.nhs.uk)
Dyfed Huws (Dyfed.Huws@wales.nhs.uk)

Version: 2 Date: 01 Jul 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

Submission to Systematic Reviews - SYSR-D-18-00485

RESPONSE TO EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Q: In what time frame did your stakeholders want the results of the review? (from which readers will then know what was considered an unreasonable time frame for a de novo systematic review).
A: It is difficult to both answer this question in a succinct manner for inclusion in the paper, and to gauge the time frame for a de novo review using this approach.

The underlying purpose of the study was to inform the development of multivariate modelling of Welsh data proposed by the Welsh Cancer Intelligence & Surveillance Unit (WCISU) (which aimed to identify important prognostic factors of LC survival that can be used to inform the future development of interventions to improve LC survival in Wales). The work was funded by Public Health Wales (PHW) over two time periods: 1st July 2015 – 31st March 2016, and 1st July 2016 – 31st March 2017. The systematic mapping review was conducted as part of the first funded period, and the overview of reviews during the second period. A final report was submitted to the funder (who, in this instance were not the stakeholders) at the end of each funded period. PHW also required 6-monthly reports, which were also submitted to the stakeholders.

The stakeholders in this instance was the Sponsor, Dr Dyfed Huws, who is the director of the WCISU, and Dr. Gareth Collier, who is a Consultant Respiratory Physician. We provided the stakeholders with an ongoing progress report, and had monthly teleconference meetings with them, during the entire project, to keep them up to date and answer any ongoing queries. The stakeholders were co-authors of the final report submitted to the funders.

The literature review was only part of the work funded for this project during the 2015-16 period, which also included the analysis of routine data. On completing the mapping review for this first period, we had to submit a proposal to PHW for funding during the second period (2016-17). Our department also received funding for other PHW projects at the same time, and many staff members worked on multiple projects. A number of staff members therefore worked on the literature review, but not 100% of their time, and for different periods throughout the project. It is therefore difficult to gauge the time frame for a de novo review using this approach.

A long-winded explanation of the funding process for our project, which impacted when the stakeholders needed the results, is probably not useful in this instance. However, we agree that it would be useful for the reader to know how long it took us to produce the review. This is now included in the Discussion.

The text under the header ‘Review methods’ has been revised and expanded to incorporate a brief explanation of the funding process, and who the stakeholders were and how we kept them informed throughout the project.

Q: How long did it take you to produce your rapid review? As you know, this term "rapid" can mean quite different things to different stakeholders, from a few weeks (or even as short as 1 week) to 9 months, which doesn't seem very rapid.
A: This has now been added to the Discussion section (5th paragraph), with an added caveat of the challenges that we faced, which could make this a lengthy review.

NB. In the Discussion section, previous paragraphs 5 and 6 have been swapped around, and the first sentence of the previous paragraph 6 (In capturing the breadth of the literature, we inevitably lost depth and detail) has now been moved to the start of paragraph 7.

Q: At what point in the process were you able to provide your stakeholders with the preliminary list of prognostic factors?

A: A complete list of potential prognostic factors was produced as an output for stage 1 and included in the final report submitted to the funder (with a deadline of 31st March 2016). The stakeholders were co-authors of the final report. A preliminary list of factors was provided to the stakeholders as soon as we developed the initial coding scheme, the exact timing of which I cannot remember.

The text under the header ‘Review methods’ has now been revised and no longer specifically mentions providing the stakeholders with the preliminary list of prognostic factors. The duration of the review, and timing of the mapping review, which was used to develop the initial list of prognostic factors, is now discussed in the Discussion section (5th paragraph).

Q: And then again working this information into the Discussion, for example "where a review of wide-ranging systematic reviews is needed in a relatively short time frame." How short is short? Adding this kind of time information will help readers know when your methods might be useful to them.

A: This is now included in the Discussion section (5th paragraph). The first sentence of the 4th paragraph has also been revised to clarify that the term ‘rapid reviews’ comes from the fact that both systematic mapping reviews and overview of reviews, are referred to as rapid review approaches. Essentially, the purpose here was to develop an efficient reviewing approach rather than one that is conducted within a specific time period.