Author’s response to reviews

Title: Treatment of Pre and Confirmed Cervical Cancer in HIV-seropositive Women from Developing Countries: A Systematic Review

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18 March 2020

To: Susan Wieland
Systematic Reviews Journal

Re: SYSR-D-19-00375R1 Treatment of Cervical Cancer in HIV-seropositive Women from Developing Countries: A Systematic Review

Thank you for the email dated 19th February 2020 that had very valuable feedback from the reviewers on our submitted manuscript.

The authors appreciate the journal’s efforts and the reviewers’ time. We have made changes to our manuscript based on the reviewers’ feedback and recommendations. All the changes in the manuscript are coloured in red for reference. Please find below a point-by-point response to the raised issues.

Sincerely,

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Response to Reviewers

Reviewer 1 Comments
Issue 1 (p. 7 para 2): I think the authors misunderstood the reviewer comment. The authors need to explain what factors were considered in assessing quality on the instruments they used, and what methods they used in assessing quality (eg, one person assessed, two people with discussion, etc.). There is also no mention of how quality (or risk of bias) was assessed for the randomized controlled trials.
Response: The authors thank the reviewer for raising the quality assessment issues. The authors have understood the reviewer and have provided the information (paragraph 2, page 7).

Reviewer 2 Comments
Issue 1 (p. 5): The authors specify searching dates for the new databases but not for the ones previously searched. The authors could have stated that they did not think the new databases would have produced additional studies but responded to the reviewer by adding to the study limitations that they may have missed searching some databases. Given that they did perform additional searches, why did they not update the flow chart of searching and selection in Figure 1? It is plausible that they did not find additional relevant studies, but did they retrieve no additional records at all from the additional searches?
Note that it is not accurate to call Figure 1 the search strategy.
Response: The authors thank the reviewer for all the raised issues, and they have addressed them accordingly. The searching dates for the other databases have been clarified (paragraph 2, page 5). The flowchart was updated with the additional studies that were found in the new searches (see Figure 1 and paragraph 2, page 6). The name of Figure 1 was corrected to PRISMA Flowchart (see Figure 1).

Issue 2 Section 3.3 (p. 11): There is no information in this section about the findings of the studies.
Response: The authors thank the reviewer for this comment. However, section 3.3 is an introduction to the reported results on treatment options. The section was amended accordingly (paragraph 1, page 11).

Issue 3 Section 4.0 (p. 14): There is too little information the quality of included studies. For example, why, aside from randomization and presence of a control group, are the authors confident in the results of these studies? Randomization and comparison groups are important but not the only factors to consider. There should be more transparency about how quality was assessed and what quality issues individual studies had. Also, the authors mention that studies measured confounders adequately, but do not make any mention of how the studies handled confounders and what the effects of this were upon the study findings.
Response: The authors thank the reviewer for pointing out the quality assessment issue. The quality assessment process has been explained better including key issues that were identified for each of the included studies (paragraph 1, page 14).
Issue 4 Section 5.0 (p. 15): The statements that therapies ‘are effective’ may be an overstatement given the limited available evidence (few studies etc.) and it would be better to use language such as ‘appear to be effective’. The authors should check the Discussion to ensure that they are not overstating the ability of the available evidence to firmly establish specific findings.

Response: We thank the reviewer for pointing out this. We have replaced the ‘are effective’ phrase with ‘appear to be effective’ (see Discussion section, pages 14-17).

Issue 5 Section 5.0: Overall, this section contains a lot of repetition of results in addition to summation and discussion. The section could be greatly shortened and focused by omitting results that have already been stated. The reviewers had suggested shortening the Discussion section, and I do not think this was done.

Response: The Discussion section was amended with all the repeated results and summation removed. (see Discussion section, pages 14-17).