Reviewer’s report

Title: Stakeholder involvement in systematic reviews: a protocol for a systematic review of methods, outcomes and effects

Version: 1 Date: 21 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Claire Vale

Reviewer's report:

I thought this was a very interesting, well written and well set out protocol for a systematic review of stakeholder involvement in systematic reviews. I felt the authors have been very thorough in the development of the review questions and objectives, and in setting out their search strategy and plans for synthesis. Overall, I think the authors propose to conduct a study that will ultimately be of benefit in guiding and advising the systematic review community and will offer practical suggestions regarding how to improve stakeholder involvement in future systematic reviews.

I have only two specific comments / queries that the authors may consider / respond to, as follows:

1. Search methods (pages 8-10, lines 160-188)

I am interested in the stepwise approach to searching for eligible studies that the authors have presented. I think it seems very fair and is a very practical approach to performing very broad, comprehensive scoping searches. However, I would have liked to have seen some pre-defined decision rules in the protocol, e.g. for assessing redundancy of databases, or determining when further cycles of searching would offer minimal additional benefits. While the team decisions are being recoded for transparency, I wonder whether some more formal rules (akin to a stopping rule in a clinical trial) may be of use?

2. Synthesis A methods (page 14, lines 274-277)

It may be that I have not completely followed (or have misunderstood) the planned synthesis method, however the authors state that only studies judged green or amber will be included. If I have correctly understood Table 1 (Criteria for judgement of focus and comprehensiveness of reports of involvement in systematic reviews), those judged as 'Red' are studies lacking information on which to make the assessment. I would just query whether a better approach would be to obtain the missing information on 'red' studies (e.g. by contacting investigators) and
making a final decision to include / exclude from Synthesis A based on all the relevant information obtained? I think this may be helpful, particularly if the authors retrieve fewer studies from their searches than they hope or anticipate.

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