Reviewer’s report

Title: Simple decision tree tool to facilitate author identification of reporting guidelines during submission: a before-after study

Version: 0 Date: 06 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Anette Bluemle

Reviewer's report:

Reporting guidelines are developed to improve the reliability and value of published health research literature by promoting transparent and accurate reporting. Different study designs require appropriate guidelines. Several reporting guidelines for different study designs have been developed and are provided by the EQUATOR network. Several journals already endorse the use of reporting guidelines, but reporting still is improvable. More than 350 reporting guidelines are available so that it could be challenging to find the relevant guideline. The authors of this study investigated, if a decision tree tool (based on the flow chart created by Equator) provided during the submission process, could help authors to find the most appropriate checklist and reporting guideline.

This is an interesting study that not only describes the present situation; the authors aim to further improve reporting of manuscripts by drawing the author's attention to the decision tree tool. The manuscript is a novel study; to my knowledge there is little work in this area. The methodology used to answer this question is adequate. The research addressed a specific question that had been answered in the study. The paper is well-conducted but the reporting of some text passages need to be clarified:

Abstract (page 1) and page 3:

Line 7-11: Something seems to be wrong with the following sentence:

"During the submission process authors were prompted to follow the relevant reporting guideline from the EQUATOR Network and asked to confirm that they had ('before'), after 6 weeks this prompt was updated to include a direct link to the decision tree tool and an additional prompt for those authors who stated that 'no guidelines were applicable' ('after')."

Proposed change:

"During the submission process authors were prompted to follow the relevant reporting guideline from the EQUATOR Network and asked to confirm that they have followed the guideline
('before'). After 6 weeks this prompt was updated to include a direct link to the decision tree tool and an additional prompt for those authors to who stated that 'no guidelines were applicable' ('after')."

Line 19 (Abstract), page 6 - line 51/52 (results) and page 13, line 17 (table 1): There is a discrepancy between text and table: Abstract / results: 35% and 37%; Table 1: 35% and 36%.

Introduction:

Page 4:

Line 12: The CONSORT Statement ('statement' always capitalized!) is an "evidence-based, minimum set of recommendations for reporting randomized controlled trials" and not for "any report of a clinical trial" as stated in this manuscript. This should be corrected.


Line 15: Since its publication, the CONSORT Statement, …

Line 25 (and / or line 4): On this topic the following article has been published very recently which you might wish to cite: Dechartres, A., et al. (2017). "Evolution of poor reporting and inadequate methods over time in 20 920 randomised controlled trials included in Cochrane reviews: research on research study." BMJ 357: j2490.

Line 53/54: For clarification I would recommend to add 2-3 sentences and to describe the "simple decision-tree tool" you used more precisely (already in this section). You should report that you used the online wizard developed by the Equator Network and Penelope Research in this study.

Methods section:

Page 5:

Line 6: I recommend "Study cohort" instead of "Study population"
Line 7/8: It is not very transparently described when the study took place and over what period. The exact dates should be given, i.e. when the study started, the time period of the "before" study, the date, when the submission-websites and guidelines were updated and the time period of the "after" study. The period of the entire study is reported in the abstract but is missing in the methods section.

Line 18-27 and page 13, table 2, is a bit confusing: I would recommend to present- after the "No. of submitted manuscripts" and the "No. with applicable reporting guidelines" - the "No. without applicable reporting guideline", so that you got the 100% (n=301 / 290). For both (with and without applicable reporting guideline) you should show the number of correct and incorrect statements. The percentages in parentheses should refer to "the number with applicable reporting guidelines" and "without applicable reporting guidelines", respectively, instead of the total number of submitted manuscripts (301 / 290).

Results:

Page 6:

Line 51/52: There is a discrepancy between text and table: Abstract and line 51: 37%; Table 1: 36% (see above).

Page 7:

Line 1: "… number of authors identifying the incorrect reporting guideline …" is confusing. Instead I suggest to write "… number of authors choosing a reporting guideline that is not applicable …"

Line 4: "… was also associated with a reduction in the number of authors correctly stating that there were no relevant reporting guidelines for their study (24% vs 21%; p=0.35) …" Because this result is not statistically significant, I would not describe this difference as a reduction.

Discussion

There are some redundancies in the Introduction (line 30-31 and 46-49) and the Discussion (line 18-21 and 38-41): One of the two should be deleted.
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

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