Reviewer’s report

Title: Systematic reviews of prognosis studies: a critical appraisal of five core clinical journals.

Version: 0 Date: 14 Sep 2016

Reviewer: Jan Verbakel

Reviewer's report:

Dear Editor,

Thank you for this opportunity to review this paper by Matino et al, entitled "Systematic reviews in the prognosis field: a critical appraisal of five core clinical journals." The authors aimed to investigate the trends and quality of systematic reviews of prognostic studies published in five journals.

There are however a few issues, which the authors need to address, before publication can be recommended.

ABSTRACT:
- background: "characteristics" instead of "characteristic"

- although you mention SRs of prognostic studies in the methods-section, the results section starts with the overall number of SRs. Likewise the evolution of the proportion of SRs is described, but proportion of what exactly? Total number of studies published that year?

- "trend of the overall summary score": please specify that this relates to the quality appraisal.

INTRODUCTION:
- page 4 line 9: "characteristics" instead of "characteristic"

- overall the introduction is too long. Please consider dropping paragraphs, such as page 4 line 22 to page 5 line 5.
METHODS:

- Please elaborate on the selection of these 5 journals, as these are not at random.

- literature search: did you only search Medline (NB: Pubmed is a search engine and not a database)?

- number of SR of prognostic studies was hand-searched. Did you check for agreement between reviewers? Which criteria did you use to define prognostic studies? There is a very thin line between prognostic studies and diagnostic studies especially if you are looking at prognostic factor research as defined in your introduction with subsequent clinical outcome. How did you differentiate between both?

- why did you choose studies published in the last 12 years and not 10 or 15? Please justify your choice.

- how did you calculate trends? From the figures, it seems like lineair regression, but it is nowhere specified.

RESULTS:

- Please provide a flow chart explaining study flow starting from 41996 articles onwards.

- increase and stability of these percentages (for the trend over time) are not based on any statistical testing. Please explain.

- Have you considered the distribution of these scores? Now you assume normality, but it might well be skewed, justifying the use of median scores.

- In general: doesn't the trend just show that studies have become more rigorous in terms of adhering to the reporting guidelines instead of actually being of better quality? Some of these checklists were (e.g. PRISMA in 2009) only developed in the past few years and I find it a bit harsh to check whether a paper adhered to a guideline which hadn't been established at the time.

DISCUSSION:

- Please avoid repeating (or presenting) the results in the discussion section (page 8 line 10 - 21).

- please add to the limitations section the issues mentioned above regarding the methods-section.
TABLES:
- some figures contain comma's, other contain dots to indicate decimals. Please be consistent.

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An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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