

Reviewer's report

Title: Overview of a Formal Scoping Review on Health System Report Cards

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Reviewer: Paul Shekelle

Reviewer's report:

This paper presents the results of a formal scoping review on health system report cards. as such it's a bit of a mix between a methods paper and a results paper. that makes for some diffusion of message, but i suppose it's the best that can be done under the situation.

In terms of the methods part, the scoping exercise, the results are what they are. the authors make several nice points about what works well and what they had trouble with - the part about it not being "rapid" (and by extension, not being inexpensive) is a useful message for funders and policymakers who tend to think of these things as "quick and dirty" literature reviews.

Major compulsory revisions

In terms of the results, there are some passages where i have concerns. reporting results that are descriptive, such as the number of articles they found, the categories they were in, the methods that were used, the frameworks that were used - that's all fine. but the authors also report results that should really only be done with the more thorough process of a systematic review, which takes into account study quality and external validity. so, for example, under "evidence of effectiveness" there are statements reporting the results, apparently taken at face value, from the studies retrieved. paragraphs such as the second one under "evidence of effectiveness" could easily be misconstrued by readers as being the result of a careful review of the literature, rather than merely a catalog of what studies reported. similarly, the second paragraph under "quality indicator validation and uptake", the one that begins with "the comparability of performance indicators..." reads as it might have come from a thorough systematic review. since the author go to great lengths to differentiate the scoping exercise from a systematic review, i think they need to be extra careful that they do not report results such as should only come from a systematic review. in "evidence of effectiveness", without a more detailed, critical examination of the articles, i think the scoping exercise can only report how many studies assessed evidence of effectiveness, in what kinds of situations, countries, health conditions, etc., but not say anything about the results.

there's also something strange going on with the references. the reference list i had goes out to reference 282. the last reference i can find cited in the text (with one exception) is reference 251, cited as the last reference in the section under "quality indicators validation and uptake". then, in the discussion, there is a sentence about the existing of "a relatively recent review" and the reference

number listed is 825! is this an error? in any event, the authors should thoroughly check these references to help avoid confusing readers.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

No competing interest.