Answer to the Letter to the Editor of Ning Zhu et al. entitled “Anterior approach versus posterior approach for the treatment of multilevel cervical spondylotic myelopathy: a systemic review and meta-analysis” (by Bin Zhu, Yilan Xu, Xiaoguang Liu, Zhongjun Liu, Gengting Dang (2013) Eur Spine J 22(7); 1583–1593)

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The author of the Letter to the Editor raised three main concerns:

1. The “small” range of electronic database we searched.
2. The management of heterogeneities of our study.
3. The potential publication bias.

Our reply to the first concern is that most high-quality studies were included in the three main databases (MEDLINE, EMBASE, and the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials databases). Besides, we scanned the references of all included studies and relevant reviews to identify potential studies outside the three database mentioned above, but no additional study was found.

Our reply to the second concern is that there was no obvious difference between the fixed-effects model and random-effects model (DerSimonian and Laird random-effects model) in the meta-analysis of recovery rate (Figs. 1, 2). Considering the significant heterogeneity between the studies, the data were not meta-analyzed.

Our reply to the third concern was that publication bias was not discussed in our original article. Then we selected the complication rate to assess the publication bias. The funnel plot indicated that the possibility of publication bias between studies was minimal (Fig. 3).

Fig. 1 As shown on the forest plot of recovery rate using random-effects model, there was significant heterogeneity between studies (heterogeneity: $\chi^2 = 15.65$, $P = 0.001$; $I^2 = 81\%$)

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Fig. 2 As shown on the forest plot of recovery rate using fixed-effects model, there was significant heterogeneity between studies (heterogeneity: $\chi^2 = 15.65$, $P = 0.001$; $I^2 = 81\%$)

Conflict of interest None.

Fig. 3 As shown on the funnel plot of complication rate, there was no obvious publication bias between studies