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Response to reviewer's 00227531 comments:

1. Diagram added illustrating the hybrid approach added (page 37)
2. Unfortunately it was not possible to add a statement over the general efficacy of these procedures, as there was a lot of heterogeneity between the studies making their comparison difficult. Such a generic statement would not be accurate, so it was omitted.

Response to reviewer's 00252373 comments:

1. Tables including major studies added (tables 5-9)
2. References changed to follow the guidelines for authors (pages 25-35)
3. "Medial sternotomy" under subheading Cox-Maze III changed to "Median sternotomy" – thank you (page 7)

Response to comments made by the Editor-in -Chief:

1. Conflict of interest statement signed (see separate document)
2. Running title added (page 1)
3. Full names of authors added (page 1)
4. Author contributions added (page 1)
5. Order of authors' names revised according to contributions (page 1)
6. Corresponding author details added – apologies no fax number available (page 2)
7. Key words added (page 3)
8. Core tip added (page 3)
9. Audio core tip recorded (see separate attached file)
10. Citation added (page 3)
11. References format revised as per Baishideng publishing group guidelines (pages 25-35)

Yours sincerely,

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